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A STUDY OF
ELIZABETH
BARRETT
BROWNING



LILIAN WHITING

Gift of

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KATE FIELD: A RECORD.

LITTLE, BROWN, & CO., BOSTON.



1873.

BOSTON:
LITTLE, GREEN AND COMPANY,
1873.



A STUDY
OF
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

BY
LILIAN WHITING,
//

AUTHOR OF "THE WORLD BEAUTIFUL," "FROM DREAM-
LAND SENT," "AFTER HER DEATH," AND
"KATE FIELD: A RECORD."

. . . For the book is in my heart,
Lives in me, wakes in me, and dreams in me.

BOSTON:
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1899.

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TO
KATE FIELD,
WHOSE PRESENCE, THOUGH UNSEEN, IS FELT THROUGH
THE BEAUTIFUL EXPERIENCES OF EVERY
RADIANT DAY,

This study of the poet she loved is inscribed by

LILIAN WHITING.



"Known and unknown; human, divine,
Sweet human hand and lip and eye;
Dear heavenly friend that canst not die,
Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine."

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TO THE READER.

They said, "He feeds himself on visions," and I denied not; for visions are the creators and feeders of the world.

GEORGE ELIOT.



ON a brilliant August day of 1895, while engaged in assorting some papers, there fell upon me out of the air, so to speak, a suggestion to go to Europe and visit the scenes of Mrs. Browning's life and write of her. With that disregard of terrestrial condition and limitation that invests one's dreams, the instant decision to do so came and was mentally registered as a matter to be accomplished. At that time nothing seemed less probable than any immediate trip to Europe; but wishes become winged sometimes, and so apparently did this strong desire to present, as best one might, some kind of personal interpretation of the

greatest of women poets. There lingered for me in the atmosphere echoes of Mrs. Browning's poems as I had listened to their reading many a time during a dreaming childhood, by a voice now silent on earth forevermore. Again I heard the thrilling cadence, —


“Nor mourn, O living One, because her part in life
was mourning;
Would she have lost the poet's fire for anguish of its
burning?”

The touch of a vanished hand came back, and
about me in the air I seemed to hear

“The sound of a voice that is still.”

Pictured hours rose before me from years gone
from all save memory, and stanzas from these
poems were again repeated in *that* vibrant
voice.

“And there evermore was music, both of instrument
and singing;
Till the finches in the shrubberies grew restless in
the dark.
But the cedars stood up motionless each in a moon-
light's ringing,
And the deer, half in the glimmer, strewed the hol-
lows of the park.”



It is a curiously interesting fact that a strong determination once implanted in the mind seems to germinate and grow and develop its own fulfilment; and so the swift decision made that August day found its fruition the next summer, and after a May-time in London the June days dawned in a golden glory in Venice, with her towers and palaces rising from the water wraith-like in their unreality. Venice is a dream of the sea, and one can only recall his days there as —

“ A life lived somewhere, — I know not
On what diviner shore.”

The Browning palace in Venice is the Valhalla of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. His grave is in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey, and hers under the white lilies of the Florence that she loved; but in this palace (which dates from 1679) are the memorials of their lives. In its splendor it far eclipses those built by Sansovino. Its lines and profiles are grand in architectural effect, and the rich carving of its columns, the baroque ornaments of its keystones, the classic cornices, and the tripartite loggias make it

marked in sumptuous effect even in Venice, a city of palaces. Two large and stately entrances open upon the marble flight of steps that run down to the Grand Canal. On the architraves are carved river-gods.

In the marble court stands the statue of Dryope, by Robert Barrett Browning, the son of the poets. On this first floor is the room that used to be occupied by Mr. Browning in his morning writing. It is empanelled with the most exquisite decorated alabaster, panels of which also form the two doors. Back of this was his sleeping-room, which is also beautiful in decoration and furnishing. Ascending the lofty flight of marble stairs, one is ushered into an apartment whose noble proportions and richness of effect are beyond description. The floor is of red marble, a soft Byzantine red. The ceiling is in mural paintings ranking among the most beautiful in Venetian art. From this, through old Venetian doors carved in the utmost splendor, one passes to a series of salons, each holding portraits, sketches, and portrait busts of the poets, besides many other works of art. There is Story's bust of Elizabeth Browning,

— an exquisite creation. There is the original oil painting of her from which many inadequate engravings have been made. The original is a clear and striking portrait ; but the reproductions give little hint of its beauty.

There are several portraits of Robert Browning, among them one representing the poet standing with a picturesque cloak falling over his shoulders. One portrait of Mrs. Browning shows her as a child, — it was painted when she was about nine years old, when the family lived at Hope End, — and reveals a lovely girl with brown hair and blue eyes and rose-touched fairness of face, holding up an apron full of flowers as she stands in the garden, with the dog “Flush,” made famous in her poems, standing by her. In one of these stately, noble rooms there is a recessed alcove of white and gold. On either side a Venetian window is draped in the palest green plush. In it stand tall gold vases, with incrustations of green. On the white wall facing the room is an inscription in large gold letters surrounded by gold tracing and arabesques in scrollwork and lovely designs, — an inscription

that is from the Italian of Niccolo Tommaseo, and which will be found elsewhere in this volume. Robert Browning, writing to a relative from Asolo in Italy under date of Oct. 22, 1889 — only two months before his death — thus referred to this recessed chapel in the palace : —

“ We have a valued friend here, Mrs. Bronson, who for years has been our hostess at Venice, and now is in possession of a house here (built into the old city wall) — she was induced to choose it through what I have said about the beauties of the place: and through her care and kindness we are comfortably lodged close by. We think of leaving in a week or so for Venice — guests of Pen and his wife; and after a short stay with them we shall return to London. Pen came to see us for a couple of days: I was hardly prepared for his surprise and admiration, which quite equaled my own and that of my sister. All is happily well with them — their palazzo excites the wonder of everybody, so great is Pen’s cleverness and extemporized architectural knowledge, as apparent in all he has done there; why, *why* will you not go and see him there? He and his wife are very hospitable and receive many visitors.

Have I told you that there was a desecrated chapel which he has restored in honour of his mother — putting up there the inscription by Tommaseo now above Casa Guidi ? ”

Mrs. Browning's little writing-desk, one to hold in the hand, with her pen and the last manuscript that she touched, are kept sacredly in this room. The dining-room, with its vaulted ceiling ; the vast apartment with its floor of black Italian marble, its ceiling of mural frescoes, and its stately carving where the last rites of service were held over Robert Browning, — hold their supreme interest. In the one have been entertained many of the famous people of his age ; in the other gathered that memorable assemblage which followed the casket containing his form as the fleet of funeral gondolas rowed down the Grand Canal. Was ever poet more poetically borne to his last rest ?

In the palace is kept an autograph-book for the visitors who make their pilgrimage to this poetic shrine. Writing in it my name, residence, and date of visit, I added the lines : —

E. B. B. —

“Albeit softly in our ears her silver song was ringing,
The footfall of her parting soul was softer than her
singing.”

In one room on a table lay a German translation of “Aurora Leigh,” and on its flyleaf I found written (and was permitted to copy) these lines :—

“This translation of ‘Aurora Leigh,’ ‘found one happy man’ at the house of Leonard and Kate Courtney during a Whitsun holiday, and is to their singular felicity presented to R. B., until now, as he informs them, unaware of its existence, June 3, 1888.”

From Venice to Florence! It was a moonlight evening, and between Bologna and Florence the route lay amid the purple peaks swimming in a sea of silver mist; and the haunting memories of Venice, the thrilling anticipations of Florence, were equally commingled. The days in Venice prefigured themselves as an enchanted dream. It was as if one had been caught up into paradise and heard words for which there was neither earthly speech nor language. It was an ex-

perience that detached itself from all others and evaded test or comparison. As the towers and domes of Venice vanished from my view apparently sinking into the sea, I could only think of the city as a brief mirage which had momentarily dawned on my sight, or as "the airy fabric of a dream," in which I had gone through a succession of imaginary experiences.

The hills towered still higher, and the purple peaks gleamed above seas of palpitating silver mists shot through with the rose and amber and violet of the Italian sunset; and later, as the June moon rose, both the mountains and valleys were flooded with a golden — not a silvery — light. In Italy, moonlight is golden, and the moon herself seemed, half the time, in the trees that crowned the purple peaks, rather than in the sky.

Florence, lying fair in the wide Val d'Arno, the colossal Duomo towering over the city, made a picture never to be forgotten as the train drew near. It was only 11 P. M., but the city was hushed and still. The tall tower of the Palazzo Vecchio silhouetted itself against the sky. The peaks of the

Apennines stood guard around. This, then, was Florence!

The first day in this "Flower of all Cities and City of all Flowers" I passed largely sitting near the grave of Mrs. Browning in the English cemetery, with the graves of Walter Savage Landor, the Trollope family, and her nearest and dearest friend, Isabella Blagden, almost within touch. On the way I had bought great masses of the lilies of Florence — lilies whose whiteness and purity and fragrance are unequalled by anything we know in America — and reverently I laid my tribute on the grave of E. B. B. The tall dark cypress-trees of Italy stood about, silent as sentinels. Only the chirping of birds broke the intense stillness. I could only remember:

"Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds
sang west,

Toll slowly!

And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around
our incompleteness,

Round our restlessness, His rest.

Her friend, Miss Isa Blagden (born June 30, 1816), died in Florence on Jan. 26, 1875, and on her tomb is a cross and a wreath, with the words, "Thy will be done."

The grave of Arthur Hugh Clough is near,
too, with its inscription : —

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH,
SOMETIME FELLOW
OF
ORIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD,
DIED AT FLORENCE
Nov. 13, MDCCLX.,
THIS MEMORIAL IS PLACED BY HIS
SORROWING WIFE AND SISTER.

In this cemetery, also, lies Theodore Parker. The grave of Walter Savage Landor has a curious memorial, — the sculptured form of a woman kneeling at the top of a flight of steps.

In Florence I was domiciled in Villina Trollope, — the famous house where Theodosia Trollope held her salons, those brilliant evenings when among the guests were the Brownings, George Eliot and Mr. Lewes (then visiting the Trollopes), Frances Power Cobbe and Mrs. Somerville, — who were sojourning in Florence, — James Jackson Jarves, Miss Blagden, and the young girl then under her care, Kate Field. The great marble balcony overlooking the garden, where this brilliant

galaxy used to assemble to eat ices and talk of poetry and art, opened from my room by means of a French window ; and here I would draw my chair out on the gleaming marble, while the full moon shone down on the plashing fountain and dark greenery of the garden below, and the place was peopled with those figures of the past. Each and all were to me, in one way or another, strongly individualized. I had read and dreamed of this villa. Its interior was familiar to me before I had ever seen it, — the great white marble staircase, the balconied room of George Eliot, overlooking Piazza Indipendenza, the wide marble terrace overlooking the garden. It is a place for dreams and memories.

On this balcony, in the silvery light of midnight hours, with faint echoes of music from some open casement floating on the air, I could not but recall Mrs. Browning's allusion to the Trollopes in a letter to a friend :

“I have not seen the Trollopes yet; but we have spent two delicious evenings at villas on the outside the gates, one with young Lytton, Sir Edward's son. I like him, we both do, from the bottom of our hearts. Then our friend Frederic

Tennyson, the new poet, we are delighted to see again. Mrs. Howe's poems I have read since I wrote last. Some of them are good — many of the thoughts striking, and all of a certain elevation. . . . Of the ordinary impotencies and prettinesses of women poets she does not partake." . . .

Mrs. Trollope, as Theodosia Garrow, before her marriage had known Mrs. Browning — then Miss Barrett — at Torquay. Mr. Trollope, in his delightful "Reminiscences," speaks of their pleasure in meeting again, and he dwells on "the immaculate purity of thought" that characterized Mrs. Browning. "I mean," he says, "the purity of the upper spiritual atmosphere in which she habitually dwelt."

The reader who has chanced to see a little book of mine entitled "After Her Death: the Story of a Summer" will readily divine how, through all these Florentine days, there ran an undertone of sadness, "making all the music mute;" how my days and dreams were filled with *one* presence, the beloved friend whose death in Honolulu had occurred on the day that I had landed in Liverpool. Kate Field — who literally gave her life in her devotion to her great work in Hawaii — was as intimately

associated in my thought with Florence as was ever the woman-poet whose footsteps I sought to trace. The story of Mrs. Browning's gracious and beautiful friendship for the young girl who loved her will be found in these pages; and if I venture to allude to it here, it is because that Miss Field, too, was a factor in the chain of events that led to its writing. An unseen presence seemed to go with me as I stood amid the wonderful sculpture of Santa Croce, or gazed on gem-like Florence from the purple heights surrounding her, or lingered in the monks' cells that the hand of Fra Angelico had painted.

In the first inception of the idea to write this book I had asked Miss Field's permission to inscribe it to her. She was then in the far West, about to sail for Honolulu on the journey from which she never returned. She wrote declining the dedication on the ground that another volume of mine bore her name in this way, and that it was not good literary form to inscribe two books to the same individual. Still I persisted. The whole idea of the work was to me so linked with her name, — this gifted and exquisite woman

whose nature was only formed for the choicest companionships, that its undertaking did not seem possible unless I were privileged to link with it her beloved name. Finally she yielded a reluctant consent.

And now, —

“O Love! how shall I celebrate the day,
The day when thy sweet angelhood began?
When earth was all so glad its joy o’erran
In lilies clustering round the new-born May.”

Since that fateful May Nineteenth of 1896 on which she passed to the “life more abundant,” the summer suns have risen and set, and the roses that she loved have bloomed and faded.

“Thrice the lily’s chalices have known
The morning dews, and on their petals white
The butterflies with wings of dazzling light
Have stooped, enthroned, and drank the drops that shone,
And then with life’s new knowledge upward flown.”

Again has it fallen to me to linger through summer days in the golden light of Florence; to wander, half entranced, in the Eternal City; to watch the sunsets through the dense forests of the Bois de Boulogne and gaze on the brilliant panorama of life in the Champs Elysées.

Through the two summers in Europe when it was my privilege to visit English scenes of Mrs. Browning's early life and those of her after years in Florence and Rome, my friend in the Unseen to whom this volume is dedicated, always seemed near and became a part of the experience in visiting the home and haunts of Mrs. Browning, even as she had been, in her early girlhood, one among those privileged to know the great poet when both were on earth.

A year ago came that intimate and beautiful revelation of Mrs. Browning's life in the "Letters," from which, by the generous courtesy of the Messrs. Macmillan, I have been permitted to quote. The story of her life in its outer aspects has never heretofore been more than fragmentarily outlined, and the effort to make a somewhat completer narrative of a life singularly exalted and noble, has been one invested with that happiness which, perchance, always attends the outer fulfilment of an inner vision.

L. W.

THE BRUNSWICK, BOSTON, 1899.

LIVING WITH VISIONS.

I lived with visions for my company.

MRS. BROWNING.

Ah, blessed vision! blood of God!
My spirit beats her mortal bars,
As down dark tides the glory slides
And star-like mingles with the stars.

TENNYSON.

I was not disobedient unto the Heavenly Vision.

SAINT PAUL.

A STUDY OF MRS. BROWNING.

LIVING WITH VISIONS.

“ Moreover, something is or seems
That touches me with mystic gleams,
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams.

“ Of something felt, like something here ;
Of something done, I know not where ;
Such as no language may declare.”



THE opening line of one of Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese" holds in condensation the complete record of all her early years, — the line that runs, —

“ I lived with visions for my company.”

The earliest recollection that has been preserved of the dreaming child reveals her in a lofty chamber with a stained glass oriel window where golden gleams of light came through, lingering on the long curls of the




little maid as she sat on a low hassock beneath it, reading Homer, when she was but eight years of age ; absorbed in the transcendent visions of Shakespeare ; lost in the music-flow of Pindar. The life of her girlhood flowed on in this idyllic region, and it was here that one of the most charming portraits ever painted of her, — showing her as a young girl standing among flowers, was made, — a portrait now in the Browning Palace in Venice.

Elizabeth Barrett was born on March 6, 1806, in Ledbury, near Durham, England, the eldest child of Edward and Mary (Moulton) Barrett. There were two other daughters, Henrietta and Arabel, and eight sons, of whom Edward, her favorite brother, was drowned at Torquay before her eyes, — a tragedy from which she never recovered, and which found immortal expression in her poem, "De Profundis." When the little Elizabeth was some three years of age, the family removed to Hope End, where all her thoughtful childhood was passed. Hope End was in a pleasant

corner of Herefordshire and the fantastic house, with its mimic domes and minarets, stood embowered in a grove of gnarled oaks like an Eastern palace set in the rural fields of England. Her own words painted the picture : —

“Green the land is where my daily
Steps in jocund childhood played,
Dimpled close with hill and valley,
Dappled very close with shade,
Summer snow of apple blossoms,
Running up from glade to glade.”

In this sweet solitude Elizabeth Barrett passed her early years. It has always been believed that a peculiar poetry and an intense love of nature is inherent in the people of the hill districts. At fifteen her sensitive nature seemed to have drunk deeply of the exquisite romance of the scenes in which she lived. At that age she had written verse upon which already was the true stamp of genius. Her father, to whom she referred as “my public” and “my critic,” shared her enthusiasm. Slight and fragile in figure, she has often been



described by those who saw her as one whose face it would have been hard to forget, with its large, tender eyes and shower of dark curls, its expression of quiet, gentle sadness lit by a smile rare and beautiful. Her early studies were directed entirely by her father. She devoured the works of Shakespeare, and as a Greek scholar she was soon proficient, and was familiar with all the Attic writers in tragedy and comedy.

The solitude of her life, and the monotony enforced by delicate health and the quiet country surroundings, insured her a long period of uninterrupted study. In 1837 her life was endangered by an illness following on the effects of the shock caused by her brother's death. During the period of seclusion which followed, she assiduously cultivated the gift which was afterwards to render her immortal.

Ledbury was the centre of an unusually intelligent and active life, and Mr. Barrett was one of the earnest reformers of that day. In the village he would hold meetings, speak and pray with the untaught people of that com-

munity, at a time when for a man of wealth to concern himself in such things was unusual and unknown. And by his side, as still related by the old people of the place, the large, wondering, childish eyes used to gaze with upturned, reverent love, drinking in the inspiration which afterwards was tuned to such holy themes, for Elizabeth was his constant companion. To quote Shelley's words, he was "the friend of the unfriended poor." There are still those alive in the town who heard him, and gained a sight and hope of something better from his words. His monument in the parish church, in a corner by the side of a gloriously decorated tomb of the fourteenth century, is a reminder to all in this day of the work of one who strove to revive the simple faith in God that of old time held Christendom. It was impossible that the daughter of such a father should not early have felt a similar sympathy with the lot of the downtrodden, and just as the memory of Herefordshire scenes remained too strong upon her for all the splendid beauty of Italy

to dim, so, too, the lessons learned in Ledbury street lingered as the undertone of her genius.

Not only was this town her birthplace, but it was also the scene of her baptism into the cause of human brotherhood. Her childish feet trod the simple streets of the village, and her heart went out in that deep sympathy with humanity which so signally stamped its impress on all her work, and has made it vital and enduring in its spiritual magnetism.

Hope End was in the near vicinity of Eastnor Castle, a country seat of the Somersets, and the present home of Lady Henry Somerset. The young girl-poet often passed long sunny days at the castle, walking the terraces that lead down to the still water, or lying idly in the boat as the ripples of the lake lapped against the reeds and rushes that grow along the bank. No treasure is more prized there to-day than an early volume of her poems, given to a member of the family in which her hand had inscribed the name over her own signature.

All this early period of Elizabeth Barrett's life which ran on to her twenty-sixth year was entirely the life of thought and imagination. It was the happiest of atmospheres for the perfecting of her powers. "A bird in a cage would have as good a story," she wrote to Mr. Horne in reference to these years. Thoughts were her events. She was really living among realities not visible to those around her. Poetry was her passion, and scholarship hardly less. "The Greeks were my demi-gods," she says, "and haunted me out of Pope's Homer."

Her invalidism dated to the year that she was fifteen and had a fall from a horse injuring the spine. But with the world of external activities shut out, the world of inner realities grew constantly more clear and impressive. Of this period of her life Kate Field wrote: —

"From her couch went forth those poems which have crowned her as 'the world's greatest poetess;' and on that couch, where she lay almost speechless at times, and seeing none but those

friends dearest and nearest, the soul of the woman struck deep into the roots of Latin and Greek, and drank of their vital juices. We hold in kindly affection her learned and blind teacher, Hugh Stuart Boyd, who was, she tells us, 'enthusiastic for the good and the beautiful, and one of the most simple and upright of human beings.' The love of his grateful pupil, when called upon to mourn the good man's death, embalms his memory among her Sonnets, where she addresses him as her

'Beloved friend, who, living many years
With sightless eyes raised vainly to the sun,
Didst learn to keep thy patient soul in tune
To visible Nature's elemental cheers!'

Nor did this 'steadfast friend' forget his poet-pupil ere he went to 'join the dead':—

'Three gifts the Dying left me, — Æschylus,
And Gregory Nazianzen, and a clock
Chiming the gradual hours out like a flock
Of stars, whose motion is melodious.'

"We catch a glimpse of those communings over 'our Sophocles the royal,' 'our Æschylus the thunderous,' 'our Euripides the human,' and 'my Plato, the divine one,' in her poem of 'Wine of Cyprus,' addressed to Mr. Boyd. The

woman translates the remembrance of those early lessons into her heart's verse :—

‘ And I think of those long mornings
Which my thought goes far to seek,
When, betwixt the folio's turnings,
Solemn flowed the rhythmic Greek.
Past the pane, the mountain spreading,
Swept the sheep-bell's tinkling noise,
While a girlish voice was reading, —
Somewhat low for *ais* and *ois*.’

“ These ‘ golden hours ’ were not without that earnest argument so welcome to candid minds :—

‘ For we sometimes gently wrangled,
Very gently, be it said,—
Since our thoughts were disentangled
By no breaking of the thread !
And I charged you with extortions
On the nobler fames of old, —
Ay, and sometimes thought your Porsons
Stained the purple they would fold.’

“ What high honor the scholar did her friend and teacher, and how nobly she could interpret the ‘ rhythmic Greek,’ let those decide who have read Mrs. Browning's translations of ‘ Prometheus Bound ’ and Bion's ‘ Lament for Adonis. ’ ”

The home at Hope End was exchanged (in 1832) for one in Sidmouth, in which, while the



residence there was considered as only temporary, the family remaining only three years, in 1835 they removed to London, taking the house numbered 74 in Gloucester Place. Miss Barrett's delicate health was still more greatly impaired by this change. "Half my soul," she writes to a friend, "seems to have stayed behind on the seashore, which I love more than ever now that I cannot walk on it in the body." Mr. Barrett's chief object in settling in London was the law study of one of his sons, and he desired that all the family might enjoy a larger social life.

Later, as Mr. Kenyon tells us in those two volumes of Mrs. Browning's "Letters" which he has so ably edited and which the Macmillan Company bring out in two beautiful volumes, — later, Mr. Browning removed his family to No. 50, Wimpole Street, where the remainder of their London life was passed. These two volumes of "Letters" edited by Mr. Kenyon, it should be said in passing, form a complete biography of Mrs. Browning. They include all her views and ideas, expressed

in writing to a wide range of correspondents ; they are an absolute self-revelation of both the woman and the poet, and by their chronological sequence, supplemented by the graphic narrative power of Mr. Kenyon (her cousin and her most intimate friend), they offer for all time the complete interpretation of this greatest of women poets. The volumes are among those choice literary treasures which the Macmillan house contributes to the age ; and the extracts from these Letters, which by the generous courtesy of the Messieurs Macmillan will appear in the pages of this little volume, are merely as rills from a fountain.

It is a singular fact in literary life that from the lowest ebb of physical strength there began the strongest intellectual productions of Elizabeth Barrett. Up to this time she had written *con amore* incessantly, from the time she was eight years old ; and her father's pride in her work had led to the publication of one or two volumes ; but there had not been, as yet, any expression of permanent value to the world. In 1835



there appeared "The Romaunt of Margaret," and in this she touched the note which proved to be, perhaps, the keynote of her scale of life. She entered on a period of intense literary activity. "Imprisoned within the four walls of her room," wrote Kate Field, "with books for her world and large humanity for her thought, the lamp of life burning so low at times that a feather would be placed on her lips to prove that there was still breath, Elizabeth Barrett read and wrote, and 'heard the nations praising' her 'far off.' She loved


' Art for art,
And good for God himself, the essential Good.' "

Following quickly upon "The Romaunt of Margaret," came "The Poet's Vow" and "The Seraphim." Miss Barrett never liked London. "Was there ever anybody in the world who loved London for its own sake?" she questioned. She doubted whether even Dr. Johnson loved the pavement and the walls, and she said that the place and the privileges "did not mix" in love. For she prized the

privileges. She met Wordsworth and Landor; "the brilliant Landor," she wrote, little dreaming, perhaps, of the years that awaited her coming, when, under Italian skies, she should sit on a terrace with Landor and gaze upon Florence "dissolving in the purple of the hills, and the stars looking on." Had her dreams yet prefigured the poet lover and husband that was to be? who would carry her as a fairy bride to Italy, —

"With smells of oleander in her hair."

We may not know; and yet the very quality of life in a spirit so exalted and refined as that of Elizabeth Barrett is prophetic. The mind, in such a nature as hers, is not unlike a magic mirror turned forward. It sees the future in the moving time. Although inhabiting a physical body, she lived essentially the life of the spirit, and she had relations in the unseen, — companionships perceived rather than recognized. All great poets — perhaps by that very faculty which predetermines the poet — are



more or less clearly aware of a range of life about them which they do not see, but perceive. James Russell Lowell once wrote to a friend:—

“I have got a clew to a whole system of spiritual philosophy. Chancing to say something of the presence of spirits (of whom, I said, I was often dimly aware), an argument arose on spiritual matters. As I was speaking, the whole system rose up before me like a vague Destiny looming from the abyss. I never before so clearly felt the Spirit of God in me and around me. The whole room seemed to be full of God. The air seemed to waver to and fro with the presence of something, I knew not what. I cannot yet tell you what this revelation was. I have not studied it enough. But I shall perfect it one day, and then you shall hear it and acknowledge its grandeur.”

Mr. Lowell had this same receptivity to the impressions of the unseen that so signally characterized Mrs. Browning. He was peculiarly fitted to receive it, with his refined and sensitive temperament, his trained thought and high intellectual activity. His intimate

consciousness of what he called "the encircling spirit world" is again revealed in a private letter written in November of 1842, when he says: —

"I do not write letters to anybody, — the longer I live the more irksome does letter-writing become to me. When we are young we need such a vent for our feelings. Unable to find a friend in the spiritual world, we feel more keenly the necessity of one in the material to whom we may pour out the longings that oppress us."

"A friend in the spiritual world," — this sentence is a clew to the entire work and life of Mr. Lowell. He was keenly alive to the unseen companionships, and the references to this source of happiness, which abound in his poems, are but the expression of his daily experience.

It may be noted that Mr. Lowell's assertion that he had grasped "a clew to a whole system of spiritual philosophy" was made in this autumn of 1842, preceding by several years the first intimation (through the Fox sisters) of physical manifestations of unseen

presences. Both Lowell and Longfellow perceived the world of unseen companionships encompassing the world of the seen. Not that they were alone in this. No true poet can be named whose lines do not image this consciousness. Milton is full of it.

“Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth,
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep,”

he says in one passage. This fact that the highly sensitive nature recognizes the presence and the infinite aid and joy of friends in the unseen, irrespective of physical demonstration, is one of signal importance at the present time. There has been a half-century or so of more or less activity and inquiry into the nature of those demonstrations to the senses, proving that we live in the midst of intense energies of which the eye and ear do not take cognizance. The variety of aspects under which these demonstrations have appeared is familiar enough to all ; and crude and even repellent to the spiritual sense as many of these phenomena have been, there is

a certain value in all that is genuine as the attestation of a law. But all phenomena are a means, not an end. And to achieve the end they need not continue forever. The alphabet and the multiplication table have their importance, but one does not pass his life in specific reference to them. To limit one's consciousness of the unseen world to any physical demonstration of it through the phenomena of mediumship would be like dwelling upon the alphabet and the multiplication table throughout one's life. A phase has its value; but the more important it is, the less does it persist under the same form. The law of progress is in change, in evolution. Once satisfied by means of physical evidence to the senses that the spirit world about us "floats like an atmosphere," it is then time to uplift the spiritual perceptions, and to know the great realities of spiritual life through these perceptions.

The next step in the progress of humanity is that unfolding of the spiritual powers on the part of the individual which will enable

him to live in conscious receptivity to the unseen: "to find a friend in the spiritual world," as Mr. Lowell expresses it, whose companionship shall be so pure and uplifting, so intensely inspiring and satisfying, that with such exquisite response and sympathy life becomes an ecstasy of happiness. All those phenomena classed as "mediumship" will be held as a phase, a bridge, so to speak, that has led over the gulf of non-recognition to general recognition of the truth that between the Seen and Unseen there exist the most simple and natural relations, spirit to spirit, in possibilities of intimate and sympathetic intercourse far exceeding those ever possible in the physical world.

Miss Barrett, too, was one who "could find a friend in the spiritual world:" and this period of seclusion, which seemed a part of the divine plan of her life for the conservation and uplifting of her power, is beautiful to dwell upon, yet this was but the dawn before the daylight, the gleam of stars before the

splendor of the sun. Already the air stirs and trembles with the coming of him of whom in later days she wrote:—

“I yield the grave for thy sake, and resign
My near sweet view of heaven for earth with thee.”

The entrancing thrill of that wonderful Wagner music that ushers in the first appearance of the knight in the music-drama of “Lohengrin” is typical of those unseen vibrations which are felt before they are recognized by natures as sensitive and impressional as that of Elizabeth Barrett, when a new element is about to enter as a determining and transforming power into life. So she must have had some undefined premonition of that “most gracious singer of high poems” whose music was to fall at her door “in folds of golden fulness.”

LOVES OF THE POETS.


Beloved, let us love so well
Our work shall still be sweeter for our love,
And still our love be sweeter for our work,
And both, commended for the sake of each
By all true lovers and true workers born.


AURORA LEIGH.



LOVES OF THE POETS.

"His bride of dreams, who walked so still and high
Through flowery poems as through meadow-grass
The dust of golden lilies on her feet."

T is a striking fact that although Miss Barrett was an invalid and a recluse, — the latter as the inevitable result of the former, — she was never morbid, never awry in her attitude toward life. It is the more remarkable when one realizes the intensity of her nature, the profound sorrow that had come into her life whose expression she has made immortal in "De Profundis;" and when, too, the apparent monotony of the future enveloped her. But no atmosphere is impenetrable to spiritual perception; and from the time we see Mrs. Browning as a child with the golden light of the oriel window falling on her brown curls touching them with



gleams of gold, until she fades from our sight amid the purple shadows of the Arno and the watching Apennines, we see her as a spirit passing.

"A spirit, yet a woman, too,"

Wordsworth's lines picture her; for tremulously exalted and exquisite as was her nature, she was

"... not too bright and good
For human nature's daily food,"

because her ideal of this "daily food" was so noble in its quality, and she realized the transforming truth that life here and now is sacred and sweet as well as the life that may come in some vague future. When Emerson said "Write it on your heart that each day is the best day of the year," he suggests an ideal quality of daily living which gives a new interest and joy to our common experiences.

It was this high and intense spiritual quality that saved Elizabeth Barrett from ever relapsing into nervous, exacting, self-invalidism. She lived in the air of

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a romance in a drawer, if not behind a pillow. There is the love of literature, which is one thing, and the love of fiction, which is another. And then I am not fastidious, as Mrs. Hemans was in her high purity, and therefore the two loves have a race-course clear."

Mrs. Browning was always, as the French term it, *dégagée* to a wonderful extent. Kate Field alluded to this quality when she said regarding conversations with Mrs. Browning, "Yourself and not herself was always her interest." Although she could not in those days have already been regaled with Dr. Edward Everett Hale's excellent advice to look up and not down, and out and not in, she yet realized its spirit in her daily life.

Miss Mitford, whose warm friendship with Mrs. Browning is one of the sunny features in literary gossip, has left on record an impression of her personality so vividly pictorial that every sketch of Mrs. Browning has invariably included that paragraph, which is one that age does not wither nor custom stale. Miss Mitford thus described her:—

"Elizabeth Barrett was one of the most interesting persons I ever saw. Of a slight, delicate figure, with a shower of dark curls falling on either side of a most expressive face, large tender eyes, richly fringed by dark lashes, a smile like a sunbeam, and such a look of youthfulness that I had some difficulty in persuading a friend that she was old enough to be introduced into society."

There is a vein of psychical interest in the universal testimony to her girlish appearance in the decade of her thirties. She had lived simply the life of a spirit, — the life of intellectual work, of artistic achievement, of uplifted thought, of noble and generous feeling, — and the ordinary jar and fret of human life had not touched her with its impress. It is interesting to contemplate her here, unconsciously waiting on the threshold of that glowing inflorescence of life which awaited her in the near but unforeseen future. The friend and lover whose life was to complete hers had not yet dawned on her horizon. But the divine power that formed her to

be his "lyric love" was bringing them both nearer to each other.

Men speak of "the spiritual world" as if it were the realm that lies beyond that change we call death. But the present, too, is the spiritual world, and all men and women are spiritual beings, here and now, who may live the high life of the spirit in whatever degree they will. Whether in or out of the body, what does it matter? For the life of the spirit is largely inclusive, and comprehends all the intellectual as well as the moral power: all literary achievement, all artistic expression, whether through painting, sculpture, music, or literature; all the goodness and the greatness that lends glory to life; all the tenderness and the thoughtful consideration, all the sympathy and the love, that redeem humanity. This, too, is the spiritual world, and spirit to spirit o'erleaps the bound of physical space and flashes its swift recognition even as "star to star vibrates light." And who may foresee the pathway? "We are all of us denying or fulfilling prayers," says George Eliot; "we

walk amidst invisible outstretched arms and pleadings. Life is as nothing but the beginning of fulfilment."

It was in April of 1843 that Miss Barrett in a private letter to a friend expresses her thanks for a copy of a paper which she notes as containing ". . . a notice of Mr. Browning's 'Blot on the 'Scutcheon,' which would make one poet furious (the 'infelix Talfourd') and another a little melancholy,—namely, Mr. Browning himself. There is truth on both sides, but it seems to me hard truth on Browning. I do assure you I never saw him in my life—do not know him even by correspondence—and yet, whether through fellow-feeling for Eleusinian mysteries, or whether through the more generous motive of appreciation of his powers, I am very sensitive to the thousand and one stripes with which the assembly of critics doth expound its vocation over him, and the 'Athenæum,' for instance, made me quite cross and misanthropical last week. The truth is—and the world should know the truth—it is easier to find a

more faultless writer than a poet of equal genius."

The appearance of "Paracelsus" had drawn Miss Barrett's attention to the author ; but it was not until January of 1845 that the first letter passed between them,—a note from Mr. Browning to the poet he had never met,—which initiated that exquisite series of letters which were written between this date and that of September, 1846. The prefigured friend had come to her from the golden background of dreams ; and destiny, divinely ordered, was leading her on. "This was ; the rest was to be," as George Eliot somewhere says of these silent movements of fate. Of the first acquaintance between Mr. Browning and Miss Barrett, Mr. Kenyon has said :—

"Their meeting was directly due to the publication of the 'Poems' in 1844. Chancing to express his admiration of them to Mr. Kenyon, who had been his friend since 1839 and his father's school-fellow in years long distant, Mr. Browning was urged by him to write to Miss Barrett himself, and tell her of his pleasure in her work.

Possibly the allusion to him in 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship' may have been felt as furnishing an excuse for addressing her; however that may be, he took Mr. Kenyon's advice, and in January, 1845, we find Miss Barrett in 'ecstasies' over a letter (evidently the first) from 'Browning the poet, Browning the author of "Paracelsus" and king of the mystics.'

"The correspondence, once begun, continued to flourish; and in the course of the same month Miss Barrett tells Mrs. Martin that she is 'getting deeper and deeper into correspondence with Robert Browning, poet and mystic; and we are growing to be the truest of friends.' At the end of May, when the return of summer brought her a renewal of strength, they met face to face for the first time; and from that time Robert Browning was included in a small list of privileged friends who were admitted to visit her in person."

The story of this courtship is the exquisite and ideal one in all the tales of romance. The reading of the letters which passed between the lovers during these eighteen months reveal the wonderful way in which their natures were the complement of each other, never the mere echo. While the letters are

full of the most delicate and ineffable tenderness, they are also full of strong intellectual views, critical expression, keenness of insight, and vital interest in the events of the day.

In January of 1845, Miss Barrett wrote to a friend : " I am getting deeper and deeper into correspondence with Robert Browning, poet and mystic, and we are growing to be the best of friends. If I live a little longer shut up in this room, I shall certainly know everybody in this world."

The strange character of Mr. Barrett, who was unwilling that any of his children should marry, and especially unrelenting regarding his eldest daughter, compelled her to choose between relinquishing all her hope and happiness, and slipping out from her father's house unknown to him, for the marriage ceremony. So it was that, accompanied only by her maid, she went to the marriage altar. Only a few personal friends knew of this. Mrs. Browning writes that although she again and again refused to allow Mr. Browning to speak of marriage, still, " The letters

and the visits rained down more and more, and in every one there was something which was too slight to analyze and notice, but too decided not to be understood. So then I showed him how he was throwing into the ashes his best affections, — how the common gifts of youth and cheerfulness were behind me ; how I had not strength even of heart for the ordinary duties of life, — everything I told him and showed him, to which he did not answer by a single compliment, but simply that he had not then to choose, and that I might be right, or he might be right, he was not there to decide, but that he loved me and should to his last hour. He said that the freshness of youth had passed with him also, and that he had studied the world out of books and seen many women, yet had never loved one until he had seen me.”

In September of 1846 they were married in the parish church of Marylebone, and after an interval of a week (during which time, according to Mrs. Sutherland Orr, Mr. Browning did not try to see her, as he


could not bear the hypocrisy of asking for her by her maiden name) she stole downstairs when the family were at dinner and joined him, and they crossed to Paris that night. That Mr. Barrett never forgave his daughter was her lifelong sorrow, but so far as the story can be given to the world it is already familiar. Although before her marriage, which took place in her fortieth year, she had won fame, her real life, her true achievements, were to come after that event. Up to this time she had lived the life of invalid seclusion, peopled by visions and dreams. Yet into this charmed silence where the echoes of outer life came not, were voices that spoke to her, and she had produced "Prometheus Bound," "The Seraphim," "A Drama of Exile," many of her greatest lyrics, and "Lady Geraldine's Courtship."

Marriage was to her the crossing of the mystic line that defined the boundaries between the land of dreams and the land of reality. Her marriage journey reminds us of

the bearing of Brünhilde by her lover through the sacred fire that encircled and enchained her.

Mr. and Mrs. Browning left England immediately for Paris and thence to Italy. "The week in Paris!" she writes. "Such a strange week as it was, altogether like a vision. Whether in the body or out of the body, I could scarcely tell."

The new life with which Mrs. Browning was endowed is a signal instance of the power that we now recognize as auto-suggestion. The larger outlook open before her not only stimulated her desires, but inspired her with the conviction that she might enter into its new realms. Auto-suggestion began to work,—that most practical, as well as most potent force, in life. It is a kind of subtle, determining energy, elusive in its nature, escaping analysis or classification, but acting as the controlling, the all-determining power of our lives. It is as elastic as air, and as flexible and all-pervasive. It is as potent as the mysterious force that Keeley sought to



discover, yet this dominating energy, by which we are so largely directed, is to us mysterious and unknown. The secret of all success and happiness is to learn its nature and laws.

Auto-suggestion proceeds from the higher self. It is the higher controlling the lower ; but so long as we are unconscious of the nature and power of this higher self and its relation to the lower, we cannot receive the entire directions it offers, nor clearly comprehend those that we do receive. There has been a great deal of talk about the lower and the higher self, the consciousness and sub-consciousness ; and much of this talk has rather steeped the subject in mystery than left it clear.

Leaving the variously vague terms it may be called the higher consciousness, or our real self. It may be conceived of as a gift of the immortal being who is temporarily incarnated in the physical world, but whose truest and real life is still within the unseen world and companioned by unseen friends. Now it is only a part, a fragment of the complete con-

sciousness which animates the temporal body. "Our life is hid with Christ in God." That is, our most real life always is being lived in the unseen world. The degree in which the lower conscious life is able to draw upon this higher and more real life, the finer and more important are its powers and achievements. The secret of success and happiness would be to establish perfect relations between this higher, this more permanent and real self and the lower self, or the objective consciousness. Auto-suggestion is made by the higher self to the lower. Just in proportion as the latter can relate itself to the former and learn to recognize its messages, just in that proportion will life be joy and exhilaration.

It is possible to realize this higher self in the daily, outward living; to come into a unity with this larger spiritual force from which the conscious spirit draws its energy, and thus receive the constant guidance, the unfailing instruction, of auto-suggestion.

How can it be done? First, by a recognition of its possibility. Let one learn to think

of himself as a spiritual being dwelling in a spiritual world, with the responsibility upon him to order his outward manifestation of life while here with the serene dignity, courtesy, sweetness, and love that is the natural expression of the higher nature. He must live worthily of himself.

Again, he must train himself to rely on this higher nature. The spiritual self has its spiritual perceptions. It can see and hear what cannot be seen or heard by the outer eye and ear. It perceives, as by clairvoyance and clairsaudience. These results simply follow when one learns to allow his higher self to take the control and dwell in the spiritual world of forces, rather than passively and blindly in the physical world of causes. Mrs. Browning intuitively perceived this philosophy, and it controlled her life and shaped her noble destiny.

Paris was always associated to her with Victor Hugo, for whose freedom from exile she so eloquently pleaded with the Emperor Napoleon in a letter addressed to him in the

spring of 1857. The high spirit of Victor Hugo was akin to her own, and she gave a true recognition to the genius that could express itself in such words, for instance, as these : —

“ Utilize nature, that gigantic auxiliary ; enlist every breeze, every waterfall, every magnetic current, in your service. This globe has a subterranean network of veins, through which flows a marvellous circulation of water, oil, and fire ; pierce this vein of the globe and let the water feed your fountains, the oil your lamps, and the fire your hearts. . . . Utopia must be seized and forced to bear the yoke of reality. The abstract must be resolved into the concrete. If God had intended that man should go backward, he would have given him an eye in the back of his head. Let us look always toward the dawn. What matters the storm to me if I have a compass ? What power can event gain over me if I have a conscience ? Supernatural ? Yes. If you add anything to nature, you must of necessity rise above her.”

Mrs. Browning fully shared Victor Hugo's grand perception that the universe is made

for man, not man for the universe. Every wish and aspiration whose trend is toward progress can be fully met and abundantly gratified. There is no more limit to the gratification of a right desire than there is to the air that one may breathe. Satisfaction and happiness are as infinite as the atmosphere. The only limitation is the degree of receptivity in man. The need is to enlarge one's view of the universe ; to deepen one's realization of the multitude of forces ceaselessly at work.

Perhaps there has never yet been an adequate realization of the infinite power of the will. "Life accompanies the will as inseparably as the shadow accompanies the body ; and if will exists, so will life, the world, exist."

One of the initial errors in any study of the power of the will is the mistaking of desire for will. To wish, or to desire, is not to will. The one is of the transient and the temporal ; the other of the eternal and spiritual. Desire acts on the physical plane among effects and results ; while will acts on the spiritual plane

among causes. It is literally true that one can do anything that he wills to do ; but it is also true that his will is conditioned by the degree to which he has achieved spirituality of purpose and aspiration. Desire is of the human realm ; will is of the divine realm. As man lives in both worlds or on both planes, he may act from both these motives. As a matter of fact, he always acts more or less from desire, and he may, increasingly, learn how to act from will. The power of will is a part of his divine inheritance. The animal desires, but cannot will. Man, in exact proportion as he develops his divine nature, comes into possession of will power ; of the power to create his own conditions and circumstances. Every element that enters into condition and circumstance exists in a nebulous or fluidic state in the spiritual atmosphere. These elements are subject to the will, that can attract and combine them in any form which its creative power is strong enough to draw, to arrange, and to stamp with the image of the purpose conceived.

There has been much nebulous exhortation unrelated to anything in particular, — a mere fragmentary approach to a great truth. To be advised to concentrate with no definite purpose is not unlike learning the alphabet without foreseeing its relation to literature.

The process of creating by will power involves, first, a perfectly clear and definite perception of the condition to be created. For all events depend on certain combinations of elemental conditions. Therefore, they are all in the spiritual universe, which is sensitive to the lightest energy of thought. Thought, or will power, is the motor among spiritual energies.

The clear thought, the definite purpose, creates circumstance or event in the astral. Once created there, the outer life conforms to the inner image, just as inevitably as water poured in a glass takes the shape of the goblet. All external life is plastic and fluidic to the power of will. “The *flowing* conditions of life,” says Emerson. Nothing is fixed; everything is subject to the power of the will.

When Mrs. Browning's poem, "The Poet's Vow," first appeared, a friend found one line in it, —

"One making one in strong compass," —

incomprehensible, and in explanation she said : "I meant to express how that oneness of God, 'in whom are all things,' produces a oneness or sympathy (sympathy being the tendency of many to become one) in all things. Do you understand, or is the explanation to be explained? The unity of God preserves a unity in men — that is, a perpetual sympathy between man and man — which sympathy we must be subject to, if not in our joys, yet in our griefs."

Mrs. Browning's philosophy was always that of this close and natural relation between God and man. She had no sympathy with the belief that would separate the material and the spiritual gifts. And what, after all, are material things? Are they not simply the manifestations of spiritual supply? A book is a material thing, but it is the manifestation of the learning, the wisdom, the

insight, that it may contain. What was the manna in the Wilderness but a material thing? or the loaves and fishes that Jesus invoked to feed the multitude? The entire material world is the manifestation of the spiritual causes that produce it. Food and shelter and clothing; opportunities for study, the culture of society, of literature, art, travel, — these are not material things in the sense that they are only of the transient and the physical. They are the forms in which spiritual energy variously manifests itself; they are means of development, means of gaining power to aid in uplift and enlightenment; to accomplish and achieve those things for which life here is designed. And why should not one ask for any or all of these? “It is your Father’s *good pleasure* to give you the kingdom.”

Man is placed in this world to utilize nature; to discern the hidden forces and harness them to use. “Enlist every breeze, every waterfall, every magnetic current in your service.”

This counsel of Victor Hugo is being constantly fulfilled by inventors and discoverers. The electric force that is in the air will yet be the universal motor. Wireless telegraphy, — what is that but thought sent by air currents? The power of the torrent of Niagara is utilized in New York City. Utopia is rapidly being conquered and invested with the yoke of reality.

The prevailing defect is to ask too little rather than too much of life. Man is made for the supernatural, to rise above the natural. The "supernatural" of one century is the commonplace reality of the succeeding one. In exact correspondence with the development of the forces of man does he rise into a new world of nature. "The life that is and that which is to come" is *one* life, one unbroken chain of evolution. The experiences that we shall enter upon after the event we call death are only the "next" life, or the "other" life, as are the experiences of to-morrow or of another year a "next" life. To live in the constant and vivid realization

of this oneness of life, to live in that perfect faith which is the "substance" — the substantial part — of the "things not seen;" to live in the outgoing love to God and to men: these are the conditions in which man may receive abundantly — above all that he can ask or think — of every gift and grace that makes for progress and happiness. Into this higher realization Elizabeth Barrett had entered.

"But one day, my siren," Robert Browning had playfully said to her during their betrothal. Life was so transcending its apparent limits for her that she paused, half incredulous, half in rapture, before the wonderful vista. Her sweet sincerity and unfeigned humility, too, are as obvious as the intellectual depth and the sweet playfulness of her nature. Mr. Kenyon, in these invaluable "Letters" of the Macmillan volumes, quotes one that she wrote to her blind tutor, Mr. Boyd, in which she says: —

" . . . Be indulgent to me so far as you can when it appears to you that I sink far below your religious standard, which must be oftener than

you remind me. Also it certainly does appear to my mind that we are not, as Christians, called to the exclusive expression of Christian doctrine, either in poetry or prose. All truth and all beauty and all music belong to God. . . . I would not lose a note of the lyre; and whatever He has included in His creation I take to be holy subject enough for me."

For conjoined with her humility and utter lack of petty self-consciousness was a certain noble individuality and independence that lent fibre to her character. Infinitely gentle and sympathetic, and the most tolerant of persons, she had convictions of her own regarding art and life to which her nature was as true as the needle to the pole. Her sense of humor is shown again in one of the letters given to the world by Mr. Kenyon,—to whom it was also written,—in which she notes that Poe had sent her a volume of his poems with an inscription proclaiming her the noblest of her sex. "What is to be said in reply, I wonder," she wrote; "only this, 'Sir, you are the most discerning of yours!'"

The character of Mrs. Browning has been so often portrayed as some abnormal being, half nervous invalid, half angel, as if she were a special creation of nature with no particular relation to the great active world of men and women, that it is quite time to do away with the category of nonsense and literary hallucination. One does not become less than woman by being more. Mrs. Browning fulfilled every sweetest relation in life as daughter, sister, friend, wife, and mother ; and her life was not the less normal in that it was one of exceptional power and exaltation. In a reference to Robert Browning's poems, she wrote to a friend about this time that his "Colombe's Birthday" was exquisite ; but "only 'Pippa Passes' I lean to, or kneel to, with the deepest reverence." Surely its refrain made itself the keynote of her days, —

" God 's in His Heaven,
All's right with the world ! "

"IN THAT NEW WORLD."

And on her lover's arm she leant,
And round her waist she felt it fold,
And far across the hills they went
To that new world which is the old.


And o'er the hills and far away
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
Beyond the night, across the day,
Thro' all the world she followed him.

TENNYSON.

“IN THAT NEW WORLD.”

“Given back to life, to life, indeed, through thee;
The new day comes; and all the past
Melts, mist-like, into this bright hour,
And this is morn to man.

“O tell her brief is life, but love is long.
And brief the sun of summer in the North,
And brief the moon of beauty in the South.”

ISA must have been forever associated to Robert Browning as the scene of his first glimpse of those immortal “Sonnets from the Portuguese,” which were written for his eye alone. The world is indebted to his good judgment for the publication of these expressions, which stand unparalleled in all the literature of romance. “I dared not,” said Mr. Browning, “reserve for myself the finest sonnets written in any language since Shakespeare’s.”

Nor to the dispassionate reader does this judgment seem an exaggeration. What wonderful lines are these!—

“Beloved, my Beloved, when I think
That thou wast in the world a year ago,
What time I sate alone here in the snow
And saw no footprint, heard the silence sink
No moment at thy voice, . . . but, link by link,
Went counting all my chains, as if that so
They never could fall off at any blow
Struck by thy possible hand . . . why, thus I drink
Of life's great cup of wonder! Wonderful,
Never to feel thee thrill the day or night
With personal act or speech, — nor ever cull
Some prescience of thee with the blossoms white
Thou sawest growing! Atheists are as dull,
Who cannot guess God's presence out of sight.”

And again : —

“How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight,
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints — I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! — and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death."

The letters written to intimate friends explaining and narrating the story of her marriage are as exquisite as any expression in these incomparable sonnets. These letters, given in their completeness in the Macmillan volumes, are, of themselves alone, invaluable. She quotes Mr. Browning as saying, in reply to her fear that her invalidism would burden him : —

"And his answer was, 'If you are ill and keep your resolution of not marrying me under those circumstances, I will keep mine and love you till God shall take us both.'"

Again she writes : —

"The only time I met R. B. clandestinely was in the parish church, where we were married before two witnesses, — it was the first and only time. I looked, he says, more dead than alive, and can well believe it, for I all but fainted on the way, and had to stop for sal volatile at a chemist's shop. The support through it all was *my*

trust in him, for no woman who ever committed a like act of trust has had stronger motive to hold by. Now may I not tell you that his genius and all but miraculous attainments are the least things in him, the moral nature being of the very noblest, as all who ever knew him admit? Then he has had that wide experience of men which ends by throwing the mind back on itself and God ; there is nothing incomplete in him, except as all humanity is incompleteness. The only wonder is how such a man, whom any woman could have loved, should have loved *me* ; but men of genius, you know, are apt to love with their imagination. Then there is something in the sympathy, the strange, straight sympathy, which unites us on all subjects."

Very entertaining is this glimpse she gives us of their life at Pisa: —

"The rooms we have are rather over-cool, perhaps: we are obliged to have a little fire in the sitting-room, — in the mornings and evenings, that is; but I do not fear for the winter, there is too much difference to my feelings between this November and any English November I ever knew. We have our dinner from the Trattoria at two o'clock, and can dine our favorite way on thrushes

and chianti with a miraculous cheapness, and no trouble, no cook, no kitchen; the prophet Elijah or the lilies of the field took as little thought for their dining, which exactly suits us. It is a continental fashion which we never cease commending. Then at six we have coffee, and rolls of milk, — made of milk, I mean, — and at nine our supper (call it supper, if you please) of roast chestnuts and grapes. So you see how primitive we are, and how I forget to praise the eggs at breakfast. The worst of Pisa is, or would be to some persons, that, socially speaking, it has its dulnesses; it is not lively like Florence, not in that way. But we do not want society; we shun it rather. We like the Duomo and the Campo Santo instead. Then we know a little of Professor Ferucci, who gives us access to the University library, and we subscribe to a modern one, and we have plenty of writing to do of our own. . . . Our present residence we have taken for six months; but we have dreams, dreams, and we discuss them like soothsayers over the evening's roasted chestnuts and grapes. Flush highly approves of Pisa (and the roasted chestnuts), because here he goes out every day and speaks Italian to the little dogs. . . .

"Robert is going to bring out a new edition of his collected poems, and you are not to read any

more, if you please, till this is done. I heard of Carlyle's saying the other day 'that he hoped more from Robert Browning, for the people of England, than from any living English writer,' which pleased me, of course. I am just sending off an antislavery poem for America, too ferocious, perhaps, for the Americans to publish; but they asked for a poem and shall have it."

These letters are so inimitably fascinating, that one is in danger of drawing too largely upon Mr. Kenyon's two volumes, and thus depriving the reader of the unrivalled pleasure of reading them for himself, and thus entering into the self-revelation of Mrs. Browning.

Loving Pisa, they felt the beckoning vision of fair Florence, lying gemlike amid her purple hills; and it may be some subtile prescience of the unique and beautiful life awaiting them by the Arno quickened the loitering steps. From Pisa to Florence, from the Leaning Tower and the grand old Cathedral to the sculptured tomb of Michael Angelo in Santa Croce, and the mighty grandeur of the Duomo where Savonarola launched his thun-


derbolts, their pathway turned. In the Flower of all Cities they were to find — or make — a home such as has seldom been known, even to "the loves of the poets." In the old palace of Casa Guidi, looking down on the church of San Felice "for good omen," as she said, they set up their household gods.

Strangely are the chords of the larger life of humanity interwoven. George Eliot speaks of the coldness with which we sometimes look at an unIntroduced neighbor, little dreaming that Destiny stands by, sarcastic, with our *dramatis personæ* folded in her hands. It so chanced — does anything chance? — that a young American girl had been taken to Florence to study music and the languages soon after the Brownings came, and that she had been placed under the care of Miss Isabella Blagden, who had a villa on the heights of Bellosguardo, and who was Mrs. Browning's most intimate friend. Little could it have been dreamed that this young girl, Kate Field, had her part, too, to play in the drama of the life of the wedded poets, and

that by her inexperienced but gifted hand, the best picture ever given of the Brownings in Casa Guidi should have been written and find a place in that magazine of choicest literary quality, "The Atlantic Monthly." It was in the early spring of 1859 that Kate Field went to Florence. She had met the Brownings in Rome a little time before, and they had both become much interested in her as one of the most unique and charming figures just entering on life. Miss Field's sketch of Mrs. Browning was written just one week after her death (on June 29, 1861), and is not the worse, perhaps, for the emotional fervor that inevitably pervaded it at that time. This article appeared in "The Atlantic Monthly" for September, 1861, to be followed by several others depicting Florentine life and the last days of Walter Savage Landor. By the very kind courtesy of the Houghton and Mifflin publishing house, these papers are placed at the disposal of the writer of this Study of Mrs. Browning, and will be somewhat drawn upon under this general acknowledgment,

which is but another of the sweet obligations to Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin and Company that has marked to the writer an unbroken series for many years. Describing the life in Casa Guidi, Miss Field said : —

"Those who have been privileged to know the Brownings in their home can never forget the square anteroom, with its great picture and piano-forte, at which the boy Browning passed many an hour; the little dining-room covered with tapestry, and where hung medallions of Tennyson, Carlyle, and Robert Browning; the long room filled with plaster casts and studies, which was Mr. Browning's retreat; and, dearest of all, the large drawing-room, where *she* always sat. It opens upon a balcony filled with plants, and looks out upon the old iron-gray church of Santa Felice. There was something about this room that seemed to make it a proper and especial haunt for poets. The dark shadows and subdued light gave it a dreamy look which was enhanced by the tapestry-covered walls and the old pictures of saints that looked out sadly from their carved frames of black wood. Large bookcases, constructed of specimens of Florentine carving selected by Mr. Browning, were brimming over with wise-looking



books. Tables were covered with more gayly bound volumes, the gifts of brother authors. Dante's grave profile, a cast of Keats's face and brow taken after death, a pen-and-ink sketch of Tennyson, the genial face of John Kenyon, Mrs. Browning's good friend and relative, little paintings of the boy Browning, — all attracted the eye in turn, and gave rise to a thousand musings. A quaint mirror, easy-chairs and sofas, and a hundred nothings that always add an indescribable charm, were all massed in this room. But the glory of all, and that which sanctified all, was seated in a low arm-chair near the door. A small table, strewn with writing-materials, books, and newspapers, was always by her side.

“To those who loved Mrs. Browning (and to know her was to love her) she was singularly attractive. Hers was not the beauty of feature; it was the loftier beauty of expression. Her slight figure seemed hardly large enough to contain the great heart that beat so fervently within, and the soul that expanded more and more as one year gave place to another. It was difficult to believe that such a fairy hand could pen thoughts of such ponderous weight, or that such a ‘still small voice’ could utter them with equal force. But it was Mrs. Browning's face upon which one loved to gaze, — that face and head which almost lost

themselves in the thick curls of her dark brown hair. That jealous hair could not hide the broad, fair forehead, 'royal with the truth,' as smooth as any girl's and

'Too large for wreath of modern wont.'


Her large brown eyes were beautiful, and were in truth the windows of her soul. They combined the confidingness of a child with the poet-passion of heart and of intellect; and in gazing into them it was easy to read *why* Mrs. Browning wrote. God's inspiration was her motive power, and in her eyes was the reflection of this higher light.

'And her smile it seemed half holy,
As if drawn from thoughts more far
Than our common jestings are.'

"Mrs. Browning's character was wellnigh perfect. Patient in long suffering, she never spoke of herself except when the subject was forced upon her by others, and then with no complaint. She *judged not*, saving when great principles were imperilled, and then was ready to sacrifice herself upon the altar of Right. Forgiving as she wished to be forgiven, none approached her with misgivings, knowing her magnanimity. She was ever ready to accord sympathy to all, taking an earnest interest in the most insignificant, and so humble in her greatness that her friends looked

upon her as a divinity among women. Thoughtful in the smallest things for others, she seemed to give little thought to herself; and believing in universal goodness, her nature was free from worldly suspicions. The first to see merit, she was the last to censure faults, and gave the praise that she *felt* with a generous hand. No one so heartily rejoiced at the success of others, no one was so modest in her own triumphs, which she looked upon more as a favor of which she was unworthy than as a right due to her. She loved all who offered her affection, and would solace and advise with any. She watched the progress of the world with tireless eye and beating heart, and, anxious for the good of the *whole* world, scorned to take an insular view of any political question. With her a political question was a moral question as well. Mrs. Browning belonged to no particular country: the world was inscribed upon the banner under which she fought. Wrong was her enemy; against this she wrestled, in whatever part of the globe it was to be found.

“A noble devotion to and faith in the regeneration of Italy was a prominent feature in Mrs. Browning’s life. To her, Italy was from the first a living fire, not the bed of dead ashes at which the world was wont to sneer. Her trust in God and the People was supreme; and when



the Revolution of 1848 kindled the passion of liberty from the Alps to Sicily, she, in common with many another earnest spirit, believed that the hour for the fulfilment of her hopes had arrived. Her joyful enthusiasm at the Tuscan uprising found vent in the 'Eureka' which she sang with so much fervor in Part First of 'Casa Guidi Windows.'

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"Mrs. Browning's conversation was most interesting. It was not characterized by sallies of wit or brilliant repartee, nor was it of that nature which is most welcome in society. It was frequently intermingled with trenchant, quaint remarks, leavened with a quiet, graceful humor of her own; but it was eminently calculated for a *tête-à-tête*. Mrs. Browning never made an insignificant remark. All that she said was *always* worth hearing, — a greater compliment could not be paid her. She was a most conscientious listener, giving you her mind and heart, as well as her magnetic eyes. Though the latter spoke an eager language of their own, she conversed slowly, with a conciseness and point that, added to a matchless earnestness, which was the predominant trait of her conversation, as it was of her character, made her a most delightful companion. *Persons* were never her theme, unless

public characters were under discussion, or friends were to be praised, — which kind office she frequently took upon herself. One never dreamed of frivolities in Mrs. Browning's presence, and gossip felt itself out of place. *Yourself* (not *herself*) was always a pleasant subject to her, calling out all her best sympathies in joy, and yet more in sorrow. Books and humanity, great deeds, and, above all, politics, which include all the grand questions of the day, were foremost in her thoughts, and therefore oftenest on her lips. I speak not of religion, for with her everything was religion. Her Christianity was not confined to church and rubric: it meant *civilization*.

"Association with the Brownings, even though of the slightest nature, made one better in mind and soul. It was impossible to escape the influence of the magnetic fluid of love and poetry that was constantly passing between husband and wife. The unaffected devotion of one to the other wove an additional charm around the two, and the very contrasts in their natures made the union a more beautiful one. All remember Mrs. Browning's pretty poem on her 'Pet Name':

" 'I have a name, a little name,
Uncadenced for the ear,
Unhonored by ancestral claim,

Unsanctified by prayer and psalm
The solemn font anear.

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" 'My brother gave that name to me,
When we were children twain, —
When names acquired baptismally
Were hard to utter, as to see
That life had any pain.'

It was this pet name of two small letters lovingly combined that dotted Mr. Browning's spoken thoughts, as moonbeams fleck the ocean, and seemed the pearl-bead that linked conversation together in one harmonious whole. But what was written has now come to pass. The pet name is engraved only in the hearts of a few.

" 'Though I write books it will be read
Upon the leaves of none ;
And afterward, when I am dead,
Will ne'er be graved, for sight or tread,
Across my funeral stone.'

"Mrs. Browning's letters are masterpieces of their kind. Easy and conversational, they touch upon no subject without leaving an indelible impression of the writer's originality; and the myriad matters of universal interest with which many of them are teeming will render them a

precious legacy to the world, when the time shall have arrived for their publication."

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This prophetic assertion regarding the letters of Mrs. Browning — written barely one week after her death — has been abundantly sustained by the publication of these Letters by the Macmillans, which are recognized as a most important contribution to permanent literature.

In the gray old walls of Casa Guidi near the Pitti Palace, the Brownings created a home which was a beautiful centre of life.

Happy days dawned and died in marvellous sunsets over the purple hills, and in the March of 1849, was born their son, Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning, now so widely known as a painter and sculptor.

Mrs. Browning now entered on a life of such intellectual energy and vivacious cheerfulness as to almost make those about her forget that she was an invalid. She was the happy mother of an infant whom the Italians called "Che bel bambino," and her interest

in the important events of his first tooth, or his emerging from long to short clothes ; her domestic supremacy, while her good maid, Wilson, fulfilled all her directions, — were not the less because the mother and the house-keeper was a poet as well. Indeed, with Mrs. Browning all her ideal life cast a rose-glow of transfiguration over the ordinary day and daylight duties, and her playful humor invested even inconveniences with an unexpected charm. She could mend a coat for her Robert with a smile and a Greek epigram, but the repairing would be none the less skilful. Her sympathy with sorrow or trial in any form was tender and spontaneous, but never morbid in its trend, and she always seemed to speak the word needed for the sane as well as for the uplifting view. To Mr. Browning's sister Sarianna she said in a letter, referring to her husband's grief for the death of his mother : " I shall be very glad to have him get away from Florence. He has suffered too much here to rally as I long to see him, and because, dearest Sarianna, we

must live, after all; and to live rightly, we must turn our faces forward and press on, and not look backward morbidly for the footsteps in the dust of those beloved ones who travelled with us but yesterday."

The summer of 1849 the Brownings passed at the Bagni di Lucca. They had tarried a little at Spezzia seeing Shelley's house at Luici, and Mrs. Browning climbed the hills with her husband and enjoyed the "green silences;" of her baby she said: "He does not hide himself in the woods like his ancestors, but smiles at everybody, and is the most popular of babies." Meantime the heart of her husband enshrined her even more tenderly. To his "Aunt Nina," as Mr. Browning called Mrs. Jameson, he wrote during this idyllic summer of the "entirely angel nature" of his wife. "I know more of her every day," he said, "and hers is as divine a heart as God ever made." In October they returned to Florence, and during that winter Mrs. Browning was occupied in preparing a new edition of her poems, to contain "The

Seraphim" and all her poetic work up to that time. Mr. Browning was then engaged in writing his "Christmas Eve and Easter Day," which was published the following year. He was in radiant spirits because of the improved health of his wife, and she often laughingly begged him not to boast so much of her feats of hill-climbing and walking during the past summer, "as if a wife with a pair of feet were a miracle of nature." During this winter they saw a few friends, among whom were the learned German archæologist, Dr. Emil Braun, and his bride, who was a Miss Thompson of England, a young lady distinguished for her accomplishments and exceptional culture.

For the most part, however, they were living the inevitably secluded life of artistic creation, happy in each other and their infant son, whom in these days they called Wiedemann, but who christened himself Penini, later on, and the Italian sobriquet — shortened to Pen — was always afterward used by his father. It was during this winter that

Tennyson's "Echo Song" appeared, although "The Princess," into which he incorporated it later, had already been published. Mrs. Browning, who was keenly alert to every new achievement in literature, art, or science, received this new lyric with interest, but said that she felt it inferior to the other lyrics which Tennyson had already introduced into that notable poem, "The Princess." The reading of new literature was the principal event in the household of Casa Guidi.

"Men consort in camp and town
But the Poet dwells alone."

That form of accomplishment which is the possible fruit of any hour that holds itself amenable to inspirational suggestion, inevitably demands freedom from engagements and the usual mechanism of social life. The Brownings held themselves always ready, it seems, to respond to the call of the Muses. After the simple Italian breakfast and the morning "parleyings" with the rosy child they idolized, they would separate for their work, — Mr. Browning going to a little room

he had fitted up as a study, and Mrs. Browning repairing to the sofa on which she half reclined as she wrote. Meantime the Florentine life drifted through the narrow streets below, and the lazy Arno rippled on, reflecting the winter sunshine.

Casa Guidi is within a stone's throw of the Pitti Palace, and somewhat of the spectacular side of Italian politics was daily under their casual vision. In the brief twilight of winter afternoons the Brownings frequently strolled into a chapel near them, where Mr. Browning's passion for music uttered itself in evolving some faint *toccata* of Galuppi's from the throbbing keys of the organ while his wife smiled and listened. Mrs. Browning was deeply interested in America, which stood to her for much that was ideal in government; and as the years went on, many a guest from "the States" found sweet hospitality in Casa Guidi. Mr. George Stillman Hillard, one of the intimate friends of Mr. Longfellow, was one of these visitors, and of the Brownings he wrote:—

"Mrs. Browning is in many respects the correlative of her husband. As he is full of manly power, so is she the type of the most sensitive and delicate womanhood. . . . I have never seen a human frame which seemed so nearly a transparent veil for a celestial and immortal spirit. She is a soul of fire enclosed in a shell of pearl. Her rare and fine genius needs no setting forth at my hands. She is also, what is not so generally known, a woman of uncommon, nay, profound learning, even measured by a masculine standard, Nor is she more remarkable for genius and learning than for sweetness of temper, tenderness of heart, depth of feeling, and purity of spirit. It is a privilege to know such beings singly and separately; but to see their powers quickened, and their happiness rounded, by the sacred tie of marriage, is a cause for peculiar and lasting gratitude. A union so complete as theirs—in which the mind has nothing to crave, nor the heart to sigh for—is cordial to behold and cheering to remember."

Mr. William Wetmore Story, the American sculptor, with his wife, who made their home in later years in the old Palazzo Barberini in Rome, came to know the Brownings well, and

they passed more than one summer together at Sienna and Vallombrosa.

It was during this winter that Mrs. Browning wrote the first part of her poem, "Casa Guidi Windows," of which George Eliot said that, among other admirable things, it contained a noble expression of the relation of the religious mind to the past. This poem was not completed until two years later and was published early in 1851. Its success suggested to England to confer the laureateship — left vacant by the death of Wordsworth — on Mrs. Browning, and the Athenæum urged, editorially, that it would be a graceful compliment to a youthful queen to thus recognize the remarkable literary place taken by women in her reign.

At that time Mrs. Browning's fame was so much in advance of that of her husband that he was not even thought of as a possible laureate. In any case, however, his Muse had not the facile flexibility demanded by that poetic sinecure; nor either, had hers. The subsequent appointment of Tennyson gave to

the place its ideal poet, and was the most felicitous choice imaginable.

In the early summer of 1852 the Brownings started on an extended journey to Venice, Milan, and London, Mrs. Browning carrying with her the second part of "Casa Guidi Windows," which she had just completed. Their plan had first been to go to Rome and Naples and then to Venice; but a more careful contemplation of their slender finances suggested that the omission of the Southern cities would be the better part of domestic discretion. Economy and denials had little power, however, to depress their spirits. Their life recalls to one the beautiful legend that once on a day when Jove had divided and parcelled out all the goods of the world, the poet was absent, lost in a day-dream; and that he reproached the god for not having reserved some portion for him. "But my heaven is always open to you," replied Jupiter. Apparently the wedded poets felt the truth of this; and as heaven was always open to them, a little more or less of terrestrial privi-

leges mattered little. Meeting Tennyson in Paris on their way to London, he hospitably insisted that Mr. and Mrs. Browning should go to his house at Twickenham and use it and his servants as their own, — a proposition they did not accept, but of which they expressed their appreciation. They found Mrs. Fanny Kemble reading Shakespeare in London, and were charmed with her rendering of "Hamlet," and her frequent calls upon them opened the pleasant intimacy that was to be renewed in Rome in after years. They passed an evening with Carlyle in the house in Chelsea; breakfasted with Rogers, and received frequent calls from Barry Cornwall.

In October they crossed to Paris, where they took an apartment on the Avenue des Champs Élysées, where they had six sunshiny rooms for two hundred francs a month. Lady Elgin was then in Paris, and at one of her receptions the Brownings met Madame Mohl. Lady Elgin, who had an apartment in the Faubourg St. Germain, received every Monday evening between eight and twelve. "I ex-

pected to see Balzac's duchesses and *hommes de lettres*," wrote Mrs. Browning to Miss Mitford, "but there was nothing very noticeable, though we found it agreeable enough."

Mazzini gave them a letter to George Sand, whom Mrs. Browning was especially anxious to meet, and of whom she recorded her impressions in her sonnet beginning:—

"Thou large-brained woman and large-hearted man,
Self-called George Sand! whose soul, amid the lions
Of thy tumultuous senses, moans defiance,
And answers roar for roar, as spirits can!"

To Miss Mitford at this time Mrs. Browning writes:—

"Never expect me to agree with you in that *cause célèbre* of 'ladies and gentlemen' against people of letters. I don't like the sort of veneer which passes in society—yes, I like it, but I don't love it. I know what the thing is worth as a matter of furniture-accomplishment, and there an end. I should rather look at the scratched, silent violin in the corner, with the sense that music has come out of it or will come. I am grateful to the man who has written a good book, and I recognise reverently that the roots of it are

in him. And, do you know, I was not disappointed at all in what I saw of writers of books in London; no, not at all. Carlyle, for instance, I liked infinitely more in his personality than I expected to like him, and I saw a great deal of him, for he travelled with us to Paris and spent several evenings with us, we three together. He is one of the most interesting men I could imagine even, deeply interesting to me; and you come to understand perfectly, when you know him, that his bitterness is only melancholy, and his scorn sensibility. Highly picturesque too he is in conversation. The talk of writing men is very seldom as good."

Mrs. Browning was deeply interested that winter in the French political affairs. Her health was better: she walked in the gardens of the Tuileries; she drove; she met interesting people constantly. Béranger lived very near them, and often passed their door wearing his white hat. Lamartine visited them, and of George Sand they saw much. They met Alfred de Musset, and enjoyed Rachel at the Theatre François. Madame Mohl, Mrs. Browning described as "a clever, shrewd woman."

They were guests on charming evenings at Ary Scheffer's, where they met many people of distinction, among whom were Madame Viardot, the great dramatic soprano of the day, and Monsieur Thierry. It is Madame Viardot, by the way, who sat for her picture in George Sand's "Consuelo." Mr. and Mrs. Browning both gave this winter to social affairs more entirely than any other during their fifteen years of married life, and in the following June they again sought London, where they were domiciled at No. 58 in Welbeck Street. Here they renewed their friendship with Mazzini again, and Mrs. Browning writes of him as having come to see them, "with that pale spiritual face of his, and intense eyes full of melancholy illusions." On one of his visits Mrs. Carlyle accompanied him, and Mrs. Browning found her to be "full of thought, feeling, and character." Monckton Milnes, afterward Lord Houghton, was one of their nearer friends at this time, and they met Charles Kingsley, whom Mrs. Browning described as original and earnest. Coventry Patmore and

Ruskin charmed many an hour for them, and Mrs. Browning met Charlotte Cushman, whom she liked at once.

The following November they returned to Florence, and for three years life glided by, outwardly uneventful, but marked by new poems, new editions, and by the growth and development of their little son. Mr. Browning's dramatic poem, "*Colombe's Birthday*," was produced in London with Helen Faucit (afterward Lady Martin) in the title rôle; but its success was not such as at all suggested setting the Thames on fire.

The winter of 1855 was marked by the production of "*Aurora Leigh*." Mrs. Browning when at work required no elaborate mechanism. Lying on the sofa, she wrote on a little tablet held in one hand, utilizing the backs of envelopes, or any stray scraps of paper that came in her way. Her chirography was microscopic in its delicacy. The entire poem of "*Aurora Leigh*" was written in this way; and if an interruption occurred by domestic, maternal, or social duties, her paper was thrust

under the pillows. She had written four thousand lines before showing a single word of it to her husband.

In the following summer the Brownings set out for London carrying with them the two precious treasures,—their boy and the manuscript of “Aurora Leigh.” In London they met Bayard Taylor and Hawthorne at a breakfast given to them by Monckton Milnes, whose genius for entertaining will be remembered longer than his poetry. Of this meeting Hawthorne wrote:—

“Mr. Milnes introduced me to Mrs. Browning, and assigned her to me to conduct into the breakfast-room. She is a small, delicate woman, with ringlets of dark hair, a pleasant, intelligent, and sensitive face, and a low, agreeable voice. She looks youthful and comely, and is very gentle and lady-like. And so we proceeded to the breakfast-room, which is hung round with pictures, and in the middle of it stood a large round table, worthy to have been King Arthur’s; and here we seated ourselves without any question of precedence or ceremony. . . . Mrs. Browning and I talked a good deal during breakfast, for

she is of that quickly appreciative and responsive order of women with whom I can talk more freely than with any man; and she has, besides, her own originality wherewith to help on conversation, though I should say not of a loquacious tendency."

Their last night in London at this time was pleasantly marked by a visit from Tennyson, who came down upon them from the Isle of Wight, dined with them, and read "Maud" aloud, finishing only at two o'clock in the morning. This poetic orgy gave Mrs. Browning great pleasure. The following October was passed by the Brownings in Paris, where they paused, experimentally, in an apartment secured for them by a friend in the Rue de Grenelle; but not even the flawless aristocracy of the old Faubourg St. Germain could reconcile Mrs. Browning to the inconveniences of this *pied à terre*, and they betook themselves to rooms in the Rue de Colisée, where they set up their household gods, and entered into their usual enjoyment of the French capital. It was then they first saw Ristori, and while

they were enthusiastic over her "Medea," they did not consider her as in any wise surpassing Rachel. The following summer they again passed in London, Mr. Kenyon lending them his house, No. 39 Devonshire Place, and Mrs. Browning was largely occupied with her proofreading of "Aurora Leigh," which was going through the press. Its success was electric. Within two weeks every copy was sold and a second edition called for, and within the next six months five editions were exhausted. Landor, writing to John Forster of this poem, said, that in it is "the wild imagination of Shakespeare;" and he added, "I had no idea that any one in this age was capable of such poetry."

Barry Cornwall exclaimed, "'Aurora Leigh' is, a hundred times over, the finest poem ever written by a woman."


In the following December Mrs. Browning's dear friend and cousin, Mr. Kenyon, died, and by his will left eleven thousand pounds to the Brownings. It was to Mr. Kenyon that "Aurora Leigh" was dedicated,

and his death, occurring in the dawn of its wonderful impression on the public, was keenly felt by its author, and she wrote: "It has been a sad, sad Christmas to me!"

Still, happy hours thronged upon her and the years of Florentine life were delightful. Friends came and went: the Storys, the Hawthornes, James Jackson Jarves, the Trollopes, Mrs. Anna Jameson, Mrs. Somerville, Margaret Fuller and her husband, Count Ossoli, George Eliot and Mr. Lewes, Harriet Hosmer, Charlotte Cushman, and others. Walter Savage Landor was their neighbor and friend, as were the Trollopes, then living at Villino Trollope on the Piazza Indipendenza.

Miss Isa Blagden, an English lady who occupied a villa on the heights of Bellosguardo, had been for years, as has before been noted, Mrs. Browning's most intimate friend. Miss Blagden wrote prose and verse, but her culture and fine appreciation were of a higher order than her creative ability. She was an indifferent novelist, but a most interesting woman. In this spring of 1859, Kate Field was placed in Miss

Blagden's care that she might study music and languages in Florence; she saw much of the Brownings, by virtue of this intimacy, and often stayed with them for days at a time in Casa Guidi. The young girl's ideal loveliness and rare genius greatly endeared her to Mrs. Browning, and there were many pleasant chapters in their relations. Frederick Tennyson, a brother of the poet laureate, had a villa also on Bellosguardo, and he was a favorite guest of the Brownings. "His poems are *atmospherical*," Mrs. Browning said. Robert Lytton came and went, and one year he, too, had a villa, on whose terrace Mrs. Browning one night made tea for a little group that included Isa Blagden, Mr. Tennyson, and Mr. Browning, as they ate strawberries and cream and "talked spiritualism," as Mrs. Browning wrote to a friend. "There is something fascinating to me in the Bohemian way of doing things," she said; "all the conventions of society cut so thin that the soul can see through." Her life was crystal-clear in its simplicity and directness.




Into every phase of thought and interest she entered as usual ; yet it was evident that her strength was failing, and she said of herself : " My life will last as long as God finds it useful for myself and others — which is enough, both for them and me."

One source of special interest to the Brownings was the presence of Landor in Florence. He had come there under what Mr. Trollope terms regrettable circumstances, and lived in a little house in the Via Nunziatina back of the Carmine and near Casa Guidi. Mr. Browning provided attendance for him, and both he and Mrs. Browning were assiduous in their kind attentions to the lonely old man. To Kate Field Mr. Landor was a warm friend, and he taught her Latin and wrote verses to her. She captivated him with her wit and girlish grace, and on his death some six or eight years later, she wrote three papers entitled " Last Days of Walter Savage Landor," from which again, by the kind permission of Messrs. Houghton and Mifflin, some extracts will be made. Landor was an important factor in the life of

the Brownings in Florence, and Miss Field's transcriptions of his personality are vivid.

"Seeing genius to the best advantage in its work (not always, but frequently)," writes Miss Field, "they are wisest who love the artist without demanding personal perfection. It is rational to conclude that the loftiest possible genius should be allied to the most perfect specimen of man, heart holding equal sway with head. A great man, however, need not be a great artist, — that is, of course, understood; but time ought to prove that the highest form of art can only emanate from the noblest type of humanity. The most glorious inspirations must flow through the purest channels. But this is the genius of the future, as far removed from what is best known as order is removed from chaos.

"Landon's characteristic fault, in fact, his vice, was that of a temper so undisciplined and impulsive as to be somewhat hurricanic in its consequences, though, not unlike the Australian boomerang, it frequently returned whence it came, and injured no one but the possessor. Circumstances aggravated, rather than diminished, this Landorian idiosyncrasy. Born in prosperity, heir to a large landed estate, and educated in aristocratic traditions, Walter Savage Landon



began life without a struggle, and throughout a long career remained master of the situation, independent of the world and its favors. Perhaps too much freedom is as unfortunate in its results upon character as too much dependence. A nature to be properly developed should receive as well as give; otherwise it must be an angelic disposition that does not become tyrannical. All animated nature is despotic, the strong preying upon the weak. If men and women do not devour one another, it is merely because they dare not. The law of self-preservation prevents them from becoming anthropophagi. A knowledge that the eater may in his turn be eaten is not appetizing. Materially and professionally successful, possessed of a physique that did honor to his ancestors and Nature, no shadows fell on Landor's path to chasten his spirit. Trials he endured of a private nature grievous in the extreme, yet calculated to harden rather than soften the heart, — trials of which others were partially the cause, and which probably need not have been, had his character been understood and rightly dealt with.

"It was a modest house in a modest street that Landor inhabited during the last six years of his life. Tourists can have no recollection of the Via Nunziatina, directly back of the Carmine

in the old part of Florence; but there is no loving lounge about those picturesque streets that does not remember how, strolling up the Via dei Seragli, one encounters the old shrine to the Madonna, which marks the entrance to that street made historical henceforth for having sheltered a great English writer. There, half-way down the *via*, in that little two-story *casa*, No. 2671, dwelt Walter Savage Landor, with his English house-keeper and *cameriera*. Sitting-room, bed-room, and dining-room opened into each other; and in the former he was always found in a large armchair, surrounded by paintings; for he declared he could not live without them. His snowy hair and beard of patriarchal proportions, clear, keen, gray eyes, and grand head, made the old poet greatly resemble Michael Angelo's world-renowned masterpiece of 'Moses;' nor was the formation of Landor's forehead unlike that of Shakespeare. 'If, as you declare,' said he, jokingly, one day, 'I look like that meekest of men, Moses, and Shakespeare, I ought to be exceedingly good and somewhat clever.'

"It was impossible to be in Landor's society a half-hour and not reap advantage. His great learning, varied information, extensive acquaintance with the world's celebrities, ready wit, and even readier repartee, rendered his conversation

wonderfully entertaining. He would narrate anecdote after anecdote with surprising accuracy, being possessed of a singularly retentive memory, that could refer to a catalogue of notables far longer than Don Giovanni's picture-gallery of conquests. Names, it is true, he was frequently unable to recall, and supplied their place with a 'God bless my soul, I forget everything ;' but facts were indelibly stamped upon his mind. He referred back to the year *one* with as much facility as a person of the rising generation invokes the shade of some deed dead a few years. I looked with wonder upon a person who remembered Napoleon Bonaparte as a slender young man, and listened with delight to a voice from so dim a past. 'I was in Paris,' said Landor one day, 'at the time that Bonaparte made his entrance as First Consul. I was standing within a few feet of him when he passed, and had a capital good look at him. He was exceedingly handsome then, with a rich olive complexion and oval face, youthful as a girl's. Near him rode Murat, mounted upon a gold-clad charger, — and very handsome he was too, but coxcomical.'


· · · · ·
"I shall not forget that evening at Casa Guidi — I can forget no evening passed there — when, just as the tea was being placed upon the table, Robert

Browning turned to Landor, who was that night's honored guest, gracefully thanked him for his defence of old songs, and opening the 'Last Fruit,' read in his clear, manly voice the following passages from the Idyls of Theocritus: 'We often hear that such or such a thing "is not worth an old song." Alas! how very few things are! What precious recollections do some of them awaken! What pleasurable tears do they excite! They purify the stream of life; they can delay it on its shelves and rapids; they can turn it back again to the soft moss amidst which its sources issue.'

"'Ah, you are kind,' replied the gratified author. 'You always find out the best bits in my books.'

"I have never seen anything of its kind so chivalric as the deference paid by Robert Browning to Walter Savage Landor. It was loyal homage rendered by a poet in all the glow of power and impulsive magnetism to an 'old master.'"

Mrs. Browning's devotion to Italy was one of the salient features in her life. A political question was a moral question, above all else, to her; and Italy, from the very first, was to her the living coal on the altar, and never as



dead ashes. She rejoiced in the Tuscan uprising, as her "Casa Guidi Windows" affirms.

"But never say 'No more'
To Italy's life! Her memories undismayed
Still argue 'Evermore;' her graves implore
Her future to be strong and not afraid;
Her very statues send their looks before."

Her sympathies were as infinite as were her interests, and those were not only world-wide, — they traversed the universe.

She had, too, the beautiful gift of always seeing each one at his best. Of Carlyle she said: "All the bitterness is love with the point reversed. He seems to me to have a profound sensibility, so profound and turbulent that it unsettles his general sympathies." Infinitely tender and loving as she was, there was in her a strong fibre of individuality, and she did not take her opinions from others. "I see with my own eyes, and feel with my own spirit, and not with other people's eyes and spirits, though they should happen to be the dearest," she said of herself. Always was she full of animation and of intellectual and spiritual vitality.



ART AND ITALY.

And under many a yellow star
We dropped into the Magic Land.

OWEN MEREDITH.


I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that shall all express me;
So, it seems, I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone one life allows me:
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing!
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love!

ROBERT BROWNING.



ART AND ITALY.

"There, obedient to her praying, did I read aloud
the poems
Made to Tuscan flutes, or instruments more various
of our own ;
Read the pastoral parts of Spenser — or the subtle
interflowings
Found in Petrarch's sonnets — here 's the book —
the leaf is folded down !"

IFE grew constantly sweeter to Elizabeth Browning. They drive; they linger and loiter in the Italian sunshine near the door "where Tasso stood and where Dante drew his chair out to sit." They visit Venice, and she finds it "a celestial place," "where the silver trails of water lie between all that gorgeous color and carving;" and "the enchanting silence, the music, the gondolas," hold her under their magic spell.

The Brownings were in Florence, in Casa Guidi, during the last days that Margaret Fuller (Madame Ossoli) passed there before the fatal voyage in which husband, wife, and child went down together; and Margaret, as if with a prescience of the tragedy, left the "boy Browning" a Bible inscribed with the words, "In memory of Angelo Ossoli." In a private letter to Miss Mitford, Mrs. Browning wrote in later years her impressions of Madame Ossoli in these words:—

"She was a most interesting woman to me, though I did not sympathize with a large portion of her opinions. Her written works are just *naught*. She said herself they were sketches, thrown out in haste and for the means of subsistence, and that the sole production of hers which was likely to represent her at all would be the history of the Italian Revolution. In fact, her reputation, such as it was in America, seemed to stand mainly on her conversation and oral lectures. If I wished any one to do her justice, I should say, as I have indeed said, 'Never read what she has written.' The letters, however, are individual, and full, I should fancy, of that mag-

netic personal influence which was so strong in her. I felt drawn in towards her during our short intercourse; I loved her, and the circumstances of her death shook me to the very roots of my heart. The comfort is, that she lost little in this world: the change could not be loss to her. She had suffered, and was likely to suffer still more."


At the time that the Ossolis were about embarking Mrs. Browning wrote to a friend: —

"Madame Ossoli sails for America in a few days, with the hope of returning to Italy, and indeed I cannot believe that her Roman husband will be easily naturalized among the Yankees. A very interesting person she is, far better than her writings, — thoughtful, spiritual in her habitual mode of mind; not only exalted, but *exaltée*, in her opinions, and yet calm in manner. We shall be sorry to lose her."

And when the sad news of the ill-starred voyage reached Florence, Mrs. Browning wrote: —

"What still further depressed me during our latter days at Florence was the dreadful event in America, — the loss of our poor friend Madame

Ossoli, affecting in itself, and also through association with that past, when the arrowhead of anguish was broken too deeply into my life ever to be quite drawn out. Robert wanted to keep the news from me till I was stronger, but we live too *close* for him to keep anything from me, and then I should have known it from the first letter or visitor, so there was no use trying. The poor Ossolis spent part of their last evening in Italy with us—he and she and their child; and we had a note from her off Gibraltar, speaking of the captain's death from small-pox. Afterwards it appears that her child caught the disease and lay for days between life and death; *recovered*, and then came the final agony. 'Deep called unto deep,' indeed. Now she is where there is no more grief and 'no more sea;' and none of the restless in this world, none of the shipwrecked in heart ever seemed to me to want peace more than she did. We saw much of her last winter; and over a great gulf of differing opinion we both felt drawn strongly to her. High and pure aspiration she had, — yes, and a tender woman's heart, — and we honored the truth and courage in her, rare in woman or man. The work she was preparing upon Italy would probably have been more equal to her faculty than anything previously produced by her pen



(her other writings being curiously inferior to the impressions her conversation gave you); indeed, she told me it was the only production to which she had given time and labor. But, if rescued, the manuscript would be nothing but the raw material. I believe nothing was finished; nor, if finished, could the work have been otherwise than deeply colored by those blood colors of Socialistic views, which would have drawn the wolves on her, with a still more howling enmity, both in England and America. Therefore it was better for her to go. Only God and a few friends can be expected to distinguish between the pure personality of a woman and her professed opinions. Was she happy in anything, I wonder? She told me that she never was. May God have made her happy in her death!"

There were journeys to Rome where the Brownings met the Storys and Harriet Hosmer and Mrs. Fanny Kemble, who had apartments near them one winter in the Bocca di Leone. To Miss Hosmer, just before one of these sojourns in the Eternal City, Mrs. Browning wrote: —

"Sha'n't we see works on works of your own, dear Hattie, when we come to Rome and catch

you? Really, we are planning for Rome next winter. What do you think of London meantime for the likes of us? "

And to this same treasured friend Robert Browning at another time wrote: "Elizabeth is lying on the sofa, writing like a spirit."

These typical extracts from letters indicate how warm and human was the life of literature as lived by the married poets, how deeply each drew from the living springs of love and thoughtfulness and generous consideration.

It was in 1853 that Miss Hosmer took the cast of the "Clasped Hands" of Robert and Elizabeth Browning which Hawthorne has immortalized in "The Marble Faun" as being the perfect symbol of their wedded lives. Two years later found them again in London for a time, and where, on the completion of "Maud" (in September of 1855), Tennyson first read the poem to Mrs. Browning; and Rossetti, who was present, sketched in pen and ink the head of the laureate.

But to Florence the Brownings always re-

turned with joy. Bella Firenze, "Flower of all Cities and City of all Flowers," to wander in its streets is to hold intimate communion with genius.

"What traveller has not mused before Dante's stone?" asked Kate Field. "The most careless cannot pass Palazzo Buonarrotti without giving a thought to Michael Angelo. An afternoon's stroll on the Lung' Arno, drinking in the warmth of an Italian sunset, is made doubly suggestive by a glance at the house where another sun set when Alfieri died. . . . Villino Trollope is quaintly fascinating, with its marble pillars, its old Florentine bridal chests, and terracotta of the Virgin.


"Then in spring, when the soft winds kiss the budding foliage and warm it into bloom, the beautiful terrace of Villino Trollope is transformed into a reception-room. Opening upon a garden, with its lofty pillars, its tessellated marble floor, its walls inlaid with terracotta, bas-reliefs, inscriptions, and coats-of-arms, with here and there a niche devoted to some antique Madonna, the terrace has all the charm of a *campo santo* without the chill of the grave upon it; or were a few cowed monks to walk with folded arms along

its space, one might fancy it the cloister of a monastery. And here of a summer's night, burning no other lights than the stars, and sipping iced lemonade, one of the specialties of the place, the intimates of Villino Trollope sit and talk of Italy's future, the last *mot* from Paris, and the last allocution at Rome."

Again, of the villa where Isa Blagden lived Miss Field wrote:—

"There is a villa too, near Florence, 'on the link of Bellosguardo,' as dear from association as Villino Trollope. It has for a neighbor the Villa Mont' Auto, where Hawthorne lived, and which he transformed by the magic of his pen into the Monte Bene of the 'Marble Faun.' Not far off is the 'tower' wherein Aurora Leigh sought peace, — and found it.

"The châtelaine of this villa is Miss Blagden, — a *petite* woman with blue-black hair and sparkling jet eyes, a writer whose dawn is one of promise, a chosen friend of the noblest and best; and on her terrace the Brownings, Walter Savage Landor, and many choice spirits have sipped tea, while their eyes drank in such a vision of beauty as Nature and Art have never equalled elsewhere.



“No sun could die, nor yet be born unseen
By dwellers at my villa: morn and eve
Were magnified before us in the pure
Illimitable space and panse of sky,
Intense as angels' garments blanched with God,
Less blue than radiant. From the outer wall
Of the garden dropped the mystic floating gray
Of olive-trees (with interruptions green
From maize and vine), until 't was caught and torn
On that abrupt line of dark cypresses
Which signed the way to Florence. Beautiful
The city lay along the ample vale, —
Cathedral, tower and palace, piazza and street;
The river trailing like a silver cord
Through all, and curling loosely, both before
And after, over the whole stretch of land,
Sown whitely up and down its opposite slopes
With farms and villas.’

“What Aurora Leigh saw from her tower is almost a counterpart of what Mrs. Browning gazed upon so often from the terrace of Villa Brichieri, where she loved to linger and dream.”

The January of 1857 found the Brownings again settled in Casa Guidi, and from this time for the remaining four years of her life Mrs. Browning did not leave Italy save for one visit to Paris. She was looking very fragile,

and Mrs. Hawthorne, again renewing her acquaintance with the Brownings, wrote of her appearance:—

“How has anything so delicate braved the storms? Her soul is mighty, and a great love has kept her on earth a season longer. She is a seraph in her flaming worship of heart, while a calm, cherubic knowledge sits enthroned on her large brow. How she remains visible to us with so little admixture of earth, is a mystery; but fortunate are the eyes that see her and the ears that hear her.”

Mrs. Stowe visited Florence in this spring, and passed several evenings in Casa Guidi with the Brownings. On one of these April nights they all went to tea with Miss Blagden on her terrace on the heights of Bellosguardo, and Mrs. Browning recorded that they “seemed to be lifted above the world in a divine ecstasy.” During this springtime Mrs. Browning read Victor Hugo’s “Contemplations,” and found the poems exquisite in their pathos.

The July of 1858 gave Mrs. Browning her


last glimpse of Paris, which she said looked "more splendid than ever," and where, in an hotel on the Rue St. Honoré, she rested and read "Madame Ancelot" and "Droit d'Avoir," which were, as she said, "dropped by Isa's kind fingers" into her bag. "Paris looks more beautiful than ever," she wrote to Miss Blagden, "and the development of architectural splendor everywhere is a sight worth coming from Italy to see."

Mrs. Browning was always fond of Paris. "Give me Venice on water, Paris on land,—each in its way a dream city," she said. Yet Florence was always dearest to her, and in this last visit to Paris she wrote, "Oh, how glad I shall be to be back again among you in my Florence!"

Invalid though she was, few women in robust health have lived with such positive breadth and splendor of life as did Elizabeth Barrett Browning. "Indifference to life is disease," she truly said. "But the life here," she wrote to a friend in the summer of 1858, "is only half the apple, and there is in the


world now, I can testify to you, *scientific proof* that what we call death is a mere change of circumstances, a change of dress, a mere breaking up of the outside shell and husk. This subject is so much the most interesting to me of all, that I can't help writing of it to you," she continues. "Among all the ways of progress along which the minds of men are moving, this draws me most."

There was a brief sojourn in Florence in the autumn of 1858, when the sculptor Monroe modelled the bust of Penini, to be exhibited in the Royal Academy the following May. Mrs. Browning was greatly pleased with this representation of the head of her little son, and said of it that "the poetry, the ideal grace," were all there. So delighted with it she was that she said she would rather give up the anticipated winter in Rome and have this bust, if there were need to choose. November found them, however, in their old lodgings in the Bocca di Leone in Rome, where they remained during that eventful winter in Italian history.



From the time of the completion of "Aurora Leigh," Mrs. Browning's health failed. Yet the May of 1859 found her once more in Casa Guidi in Florence, enjoying the society of the American artist, Mr. Page, — "an earnest, simple, noble artist and man," she said, "who has learned much from Swedenborg and used it in his views of art." Mr. Page painted one of the finest portraits of Robert Browning, whose Venetian coloring makes it a fit ornament of the Browning palace in Venice. "I should like you to see what a wonder of light and color and space he has put into his 'Venus rising from the Sea,'" wrote Mrs. Browning of him to Ruskin. At the Paris salon of that year this ideal creation by Mr. Page was declined — on account of the nude figure. Verily, in the forty years since that date artistic Paris has experienced a change of heart.


In that spring of 1859 Salvini made a great impress on Italian dramatic art, and the Brownings found him "very great" in "Othello" and in "Hamlet."



Thomas Adolphus Trollope, in his fascinating reminiscences of these days in Florence, says of Miss Blagden : —

“ Mrs. Browning’s most intimate friend at Florence was a Miss Isabella Blagden, who lived for many years at Bellosguardo, in a villa commanding a lovely view over Florence and the valley of the Arno from the southern side, looking across it therefrom to Fiesole and its villa and cypress-covered slopes. Whether the close friendship between Mrs. Browning and Isa Blagden (we all called her Isa) was first formed in Florence or had its commencement at an earlier date, I do not know. But Isa was also the specially valued friend of my wife and myself. . . . A little volume of her poems was published after her untimely death. It is impossible to read the little volume without perceiving how choice a spirit the author must have been.” . . .

It was in this year (1860) that a very interesting portrait of Walter Savage Landor was painted by Charles Caryll Coleman — then an art student in Italy — expressly for Kate Field and by her request. Since the death of Miss Field this portrait has come



into the possession of the writer of this Study, and the picture, together with a locket containing some of Mrs. Browning's hair, given by Robert Browning to Kate Field, and which has also come into the writer's possession, are deeply cherished as mementos of the Florentine days that have gone from all save memory. In her sketches describing the last days of Landor Miss Field gives this spirited story of the painting of the portrait :

"A young friend of mine, Charles C. Coleman, an artist student in Italy, having visited Landor, was struck by the nobility of his head, and expressed a wish to make a study of it. To fulfil such a desire, however, was difficult, inasmuch as Landor had an inherent objection to having his likeness taken either by man or the sun. Not long before the artist's visit, Mr. Browning had persuaded him to sit for his photograph, but no less a person could have induced the old man to mount the numberless steps which seem to be a necessary condition of photography. This sitting was most satisfactory, and to Mr. Browning's zealous friendship is due the likeness by which the octogenarian Landor will probably be known

to the world. Finding him in unusually good spirits one day, I dubiously and gradually approached the subject:—

“ ‘Mr. Landor, do you remember the young artist who called on you one day?’ ”

“ ‘Yes, and a nice fellow he seemed to be.’ ”

“ ‘He was greatly taken with your head.’ ”

“ (Humorously) — ‘You are quite sure he was not smitten with my face?’ ”

“ ‘No, I am not sure, for he expressed himself enthusiastically about your beard. He says you are a fine subject for a study.’ ”

“ No answer. ”

“ ‘Would you allow him to make a sketch of you, Mr. Landor? He is exceedingly anxious to do so.’ ”

“ ‘No. I do not wish my face to be public property. I detest this publicity that men nowadays seem to be so fond of. There is a painting of me in England. D’Orsay, too, made a drawing of me’ (I think he said drawing) ‘once when I was visiting Gore House, — a very good thing it was, too, — and there is a bust executed by Gibson when I was in Rome. These are quite sufficient. I have been urged to allow my portrait to be inserted in my books, but never would I give my consent.’ (Notwithstanding this assertion, it may be found in the ‘Lost Fruit.’) ‘It is a custom that I detest.’ ”

“ ‘But, Mr. Landor, you had your photograph taken lately.’

“ ‘That was to oblige my good friend, Browning, who has been so exceedingly kind and attentive to me. I could not refuse him.’

“ ‘But, Mr. Landor, this is entirely between ourselves. It does not concern the public in the least. My friend wants to make a study of your head, and I want the study.’

“ ‘Oh, the painting is for you, is it?’

“ ‘Yes. I want to have something of you in oil colors.’

“ ‘Ah, to be sure ! The old creature’s complexion is so fresh and fair. Well, I ’ll tell you what I will do. Your friend may come, provided you come with him — and act as chaperon.’ This was said laughingly.

“ ‘That I will do with pleasure.’

“ ‘But stop!’ added Landor, after a pause. ‘I must be taken without my beard!’

“ ‘Oh, no! Mr. Landor; that cannot be. Why, you will spoil the picture. You won’t look like a patriarch without a beard.’

“ ‘I ordered my barber to come and shave me to-morrow. The weather is getting to be very warm, and a heavy beard is exceedingly uncomfortable. I must be shaved to-morrow.’


" 'Pray countermand the order, dear Mr. Landor. Do retain your beard until the picture is completed. You will not be obliged to wait long. We shall be so disappointed if you don't.'

" 'Well, well, I suppose I must submit.'

" And thus the matter was amicably arranged, to our infinite satisfaction.

" Those sittings were very pleasant to the artist and his chaperon, and were not disagreeable, I think, to the model. Seated in his armchair with his back to the window, that the light might fall on the top of his head and form a sort of glory, Landor looked every inch a seer, and would entertain us with interesting, though unseerlike recollections while the artist was busy with his brush. . . . The portrait was soon painted, for Landor, with great patience and good-nature, would pose for an hour and a half at a time. Then, rising, he would say by way of conclusion to the day's work, 'Now, it is time for a little refreshment.' After talking a little longer and partaking of cake and wine, we would leave to meet a few days later. This was the last time Landor sat for his picture."

Such is the story of the grand head with the light as a glory around it that is worthy to be a literary altar-piece. As the last por-



trait ever painted of Walter Savage Landor, it has an enduring interest. It represents him in his magnificent old age. He was very fond of Kate Field, the young American girl charming him with her delicate vivacity and her exquisite sympathy with art, and among his verses to her, two lines run:—

“But I pray you, charming Kate,
You will come, but come too late.”

In another rhymed offering to the young girl he thus characterized her:—

“Modest as wingèd angels are,
And no less brave and no less fair.”

Mrs. Browning's affection for Isa Blagden found expression in a multitude of letters, nor was it long ere Kate Field was included in the same tenderness. With Miss Blagden, Miss Field often passed two weeks at a time with the Brownings. In one of her letters to Miss Blagden soon after Kate Field's arrival, Mrs. Browning said: “Dearest Isa, I miss you and love you. How perfect you are to

me always! And I may send my love to Miss Field, may I not?"


A little later, and the formal "Miss Field" was discarded for the more intimate "dear Kate," and among the papers of Miss Field are many letters from both Mr. and Mrs. Browning which are included in the biography of Miss Field. On a visiting card bearing the legend, "Mr. and Mrs. Robert Browning," are still discernible the pencilled lines: —

"*But*, dear Kate, don't let us come up if you are in the least likely to suffer from it. This for our sakes as well as yours.

"E. B. B."

The card was evidently one sent up during some illness of Miss Field's, and reveals the thoughtful tenderness of Mrs. Browning. On another occasion Mrs. Browning wrote to Miss Field — evidently in allusion to some press correspondence of the latter — as follows: —

MY DEAR KATE, — I can't put a seal on your lips when I know them to be so brave and



true. Take out your license, then, to name us as you please, only remembering, dear, that even kind words are not always best spoken. Here is the permission, then, to say nothing about your friends except that they are your friends, which they will always be glad to have said and believed. I had a letter from America to-day, from somebody who, hearing I was in bad health, desired to inform me that he wouldn't weep for me were it not for R. Browning and Penini. No, don't repeat that. It was kindly meant, and you are better, my dear Kate, and happier, and we are all thanking God for Italy. Love us here a little, and believe that we all love and think of you.

Yours ever affectionately,

E. B. B.

A little volume called "Vatican Sculptures" that once belonged to Miss Blagden tells, on its titlepage, the story of its migrations. The inscription "Kate from Isa" marks its gift to Miss Field; and following this are two others telling of its gift from Miss Field to a friend and from that friend to the writer of this Study. The delicate chirography of Isa Blagden gives it value in literary history, and on

the titlepage is also a sonnet written by Miss Blagden of which the closing lines are : —

“ I lay my sorrows prostrate at Thy feet,
Avenging God ! to Thee bruised flowers are sweet.”

This ideal life had continued during fifteen years for the wedded poets ; and on the morning of June 29, 1861, Mrs. Browning passed on to that fairer realm with the words, “ It is beautiful ” on her lips. Kate Field, who was in Florence at the time, wrote : —

“ . . . It was a night devoid of suffering *to her*. As morning approached, and for two hours previous to the dread moment, she seemed to be in a partial ecstasy ; and though not apparently conscious of the coming on of death, she gave her husband all those holy words of love, all the consolation of an oft-repeated blessing, whose value death has made priceless.

“ On the evening of July 1st, the lovely English burying-ground without the walls of Florence opened its gates to receive one more occupant. A band of English, Americans, and Italians, sorrowing men and women, whose faces as well as dress were in mourning, gathered around the

bier containing all that was mortal of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Who of those present will forget the solemn scene, made doubly impressive by the grief of the husband and son?

"We heard her poet-voice saying, —

" ' And friends, dear friends, when it shall be
That this low breath is gone from me,
And round my bier ye come to weep,
Let one most loving of you all
Say, 'Not a tear must o'er her fall, —
He giveth His beloved sleep.' "

"But the tears would fall, as they bore her up the hill, and lowered 'His beloved' into her resting-place, the grave. The sun itself was sinking to rest behind the western hills, and sent a farewell smile of love into the east that it might glance on the lowering bier. The distant mountains hid their faces in a misty veil, and the tall cypress-trees of the cemetery swayed and sighed as Nature's special mourners for her favored child; and there they are to stand keeping watch over her."

A letter written by Kate Field to Mr. Browning, in his first hours of this great sorrow, that has never before been published, is as follows:—

FLORENCE, July 2, 1861.

Far be it from my intention to intrude upon the sacredness of your grief, my dear Mr. Browning; but my heart prompts the expression of my own sorrow for the one glorious woman whom I worshipped. She was too pure, too heavenly, to be longer exiled from the diviner realm. Nearer to you now than ever, for has she not written, as though her eyes had long since read what was ordained, —

“I shall but love thee better after death.”

Ah, Mr. Browning, is not such love a godlike heritage? does not death lose its sting when you feel that *she* had outgrown the earthly tenement and needed this larger freedom? We shall not look upon her like again. You mourn such a companion as God has granted to few men. The world mourns for true genius, and I mourn a dear friend and guide. Her glorious example shall be to me as a beacon light to show what woman may be. I thank God that I have been permitted to know her.

That God may in His mercy comfort you and lead you to all those fulfilments that *she* would have you meet is the prayer of

KATE FIELD.

The words which but a few days before her death Mrs. Browning had written of Cavour, "That great soul has gone to the diviner Country," forever stand written of herself. But Life has put Death away, and there was little of Elizabeth Barrett Browning that could die.

Her tomb is a sculptured sarcophagus designed by Sir Frederick Leighton, bearing only the initials, "E. B. B."

When Isabella Blagden died, a few years later, her grave was made near that of Mrs. Browning, and in close proximity are the graves of Arthur Hugh Clough, Theodore Parker, and Walter Savage Landor. Visitors to Florence continue to make their pilgrimage to the tomb of Mrs. Browning, which is kept almost constantly covered with the white lilies of *la Bella Firenze*.

It is in the Browning palace in Venice that all the memorials of their life in Casa Guidi are treasured. The stately Palazzo Rezzonico is a fitting shrine for the memory of the wedded poets whose voice, in the words of Lan-

cinus Curtius, "shall live through all the centuries and visit every shore on earth: such power have the Muses." The palace is a majestic white marble structure rising on the Grand Canal, and on the outside is an in memoriam white tablet bearing the inscription :

A
ROBERTO BROWNING
MORTO IN QUESTO PALAZZO
IL 12 DICEMBRE, 1889,
VENEZIA
POSE.
"Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it — 'Italy!'"

In the great rooms, marble-floored, with ceilings painted by Venetian artists of the rich past, are a wealth of memorials of the poets, — the portraits of both Robert and Elizabeth Browning painted over forty years ago by Gordigiani of Florence; the two busts modelled of them by Mr. Story in 1864, that of Mrs. Browning bearing on the back the words "In Memoriam," as it was made

three years after her death. There is a lovely pastel representing Mrs. Browning as a child of six standing amid flowers, on a wooded lawn, with "Flush, my dog," at her side; and in a niche is a marble tablet on which in golden letters is copied the same inscription that is on Casa Guidi in Florence, and which was written by the Italian poet Tommaseo:—

QUI SCRISSE E MORÌ
ELISABETTA BARRETT BROWNING
CHE IN CUORE DI DONNA CONCILIAVA
SCIENZA DI DOTTO E SPIRITO DI POETA
E FECE DEL SUO VERSO AUREO ANELLO
FRA ITALIA E INGHILTERRA
PONE QUESTA MEMORIA
FIRENZE GRATA
1861

One leaves this memorial recess of white and gold with hushed steps, repeating softly Browning's wonderful line:—

"No work begun shall ever pause for death."

This palace is now owned by Mr. Robert Barrett Browning, the only son of the poets, who has himself achieved recognition as a painter and sculptor. In October of 1887 Mr.

Barrett Browning married Miss Fannie Coddington of Brooklyn, N. Y., a beautiful and lovely girl, who was warmly welcomed by Mr. Browning, *père*, as a beloved daughter. Mr. Barrett Browning leads the artist life of change and is to be met in Paris and Switzerland as often as in Italy. He has a most reverential love for his mother, and he has great delicacy and tenderness of feeling. One instance of this is that he still wears on one finger a plain gold ring given to him by Kate Field in his childhood and associated for him, in an intimate and subtile way, with the revered memory of the poet-mother in the Casa Guidi days. To his father Mr. Barrett Browning was a devoted son, and both he and his young wife made the old Venetian palace full of domestic happiness and love for the last years of the poet, who there entered on the higher life (on Dec. 12, 1889) with the vision of his angel wife before him, and the words on his lips : —

“O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest !”

LILIES OF FLORENCE.

O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again
And with God be the rest !

ROBERT BROWNING.

So others shall
Take patience, labor, to their heart and hand
From thy hand and thy heart and thy brave cheer,
And God's grace fructify through thee to all.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

1

1

1

LILIES OF FLORENCE.

"Glory to God — to God!" he saith.
Knowledge by suffering uttereth,
And Life is perfected by Death!

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.



MS. BROWNING holds high rank in what may be called the spiritualization of genius. In a philosophical concept of the universe and of the inter-relation of the finite and the infinite, she was far in advance of her time. She realized the absolute continuity of life persisting through all changes of condition and form, as the truth on which all conceptions of life must be based. She saw that the end of the temporary sojourn here is but the beginning of the more significant and positive life on which one enters by the change called death, carrying with him all the wealth of

intellectual and spiritual treasure he has gathered here to develop and enlarge in the new conditions of that more real and more radiant life. She grasped intuitively the truth that the change of condition caused by death is the liberation of energy and the emerging from the experimental to the actual. She saw clearly, too, that the kingdom of heaven is within, and made many poetic approaches to the truth so clearly stated by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Phillips Brooks that "The kingdom of God for any soul is that condition anywhere in the universe where God is that soul's king: where it seeks and obeys the highest; where it loves truth and duty more than comfort and luxury." Recently Maeterlinck has sounded a clarion call to the higher achievement of humanity in the assertion that "Our real life is not the life we live; and we feel that our deepest, nay, our most intimate thoughts are quite apart from ourselves, for we are other than our thoughts and dreams." How this arresting sentence warns one to discard all petty hypocrisy and to realize in

every social relation his sincere conviction and thought; to thus

. . . "hold fast his simple sense
And speak the speech of innocence."

Mrs. Browning was one of those rare individuals who lived daily and hourly her real life. She always gave of her best because she herself dwelt in the perpetual atmosphere of high thought. Full of glancing humor and playfulness of expression, never scorning homely conditions, she yet lived constantly in the realm of nobleness.

"Poets become such
By scorning nothing,"

she has said. The lines are a keynote to her scale of living. And, indeed, when one thinks of it calmly, the nobler life is just as possible to us all as that which is ignoble. The moment one will assert his freedom from petty cares, perplexities, troubles, and anxieties, that moment they fall off of themselves.

M. Victor Charbonnel, in his wonderfully arresting book, "*La Volonté de Vivre*," re-

cently translated and published under the title of "The Victory of the Will," says:—

"We have only to close the sanctuary of our soul, and accustom our eyes to its shades, in order to see splendors shine forth, to hear voices that inspire and counsel."

Again we find M. Charbonnel saying:—

"It often is not we who live, but it is the world that lives in us. The most sacred shrine of our soul is invaded, dominated, profaned by outside forces. Our inner life is a thoroughfare intruded upon by unwelcome guests. By means of our senses the external life takes control of our spirit, even of our very flesh. . . . We end by submitting to the trivialities that surround us."


Yet we all, in our bitter moments, make our protest against these trivialities, and it is possible for us to so eliminate them from our consciousness that they shall lose their power to entangle and enslave our lives.

The inevitable seclusion of Mrs. Browning's life resulting from her invalid state doubtless contributed to intensify her spiritual vision, although this would not have been

the result had not her spiritual nature have been so developed as to have dominated her. A world that would have been a circumscribed imprisonment to the ordinary invalid was to her the opening into all the infinite realms of diviner life. This spirituality of her genius, combined, as it was, with the largest philosophic thought and high intellectual culture, gives her claim to rank among the nobler poets of all time. There is no need of invidious distinction in estimating Mrs. Browning, nor of saying that she stands supreme among women poets. For whether the poet be man or woman is not of itself of importance; and if Mrs. Browning in her philosophic grasp surpasses all others, she has also in pure lyric art been surpassed. All true poets, whether men or women, have each some individual claim which it is a part of the higher criticism to appreciate; and one who should fail in this individual appreciation of the many would thereby invalidate his title to any attempt to interpret adequately Elizabeth Barrett Browning. "The first to

see merit, she was the last to censure faults," said Kate Field of her, and "she gave the praise that she felt with a generous hand. No one so heartily rejoiced in the success of others; no one was so modest in her own triumphs." Were she now here, she would be the first to recognize the mystic beauty of Christina Rossetti, the subtile philosophy of Julia Ward Howe, the lyric loveliness of Louise Chandler Moulton, the high heroic thought of Helen Hunt Jackson, the exquisite insight and delicate art of Edith Thomas. No true appreciation of one singer is gained by depreciation of others. Like a bouquet of flowers the perfection of each is the perfection of all, and it is not for an American writing of this noble English poet, to fail in recognition of the women poets of her own country, or of that great English lyrist, Christina Rossetti.

Yet with the completest recognition one joyfully offers to other poets who have charmed the hours it must be conceded that Mrs. Browning's power to kindle thought and to illuminate spiritual problems is unsurpassed



by any English-speaking poet since Shakespeare. She is not only the most philosophical poet, seeing the questions of the times in their large relations, but she has given in her work a complete gospel of applied Christianity, and she sees all poetry as a divine instrument through which to radiate influence.

“ Art’s a service, — mark :
A silver key is given to thy clasp.
And thou shalt stand unwearied, night and day,
And fix it in the hard, slow-turning wards.”

She believed that life “develops from within ;” that

“ It takes a soul
To move a body.”

The pernicious doctrine of “ Art for art’s sake ” so often entwined in æsthetic fervors never clouded her clear, honest vision. She saw in Art the most potent factor for high service, and she held that it existed for Love’s sake, for the sake of human co-operation with the purposes of God.

There are passages in “ Aurora Leigh ” which may not unjustly be held to rival

Shakespeare. To the profundity of thought resulting from the union of great natural powers and classic culture, she united the intuitive gift of spiritual divination. Often defective in poetic expression, she was almost supreme in poetic grasp and vision. Something of the sublimity that Dante caught is reflected in her "Vision of Poets." What ethereal beauty in the picture of the forest

"Upon whose floor the verdure fades,"

and where

"To a faint silver, — pavement fair
The antique wood-nymphs scarce would dare
To foot-print o'er had such been there."

There was one, —

"The poet who with spirit-kiss
Familiar had long claimed for his
Whatever earthly beauty is, —

"Who also in his spirit bore
A Beauty passing the earth's store
Walked calmly onward evermore."

With Mrs. Browning, as is also true with Mrs. Howe, her wide culture was one special

source of her inspiration. The strength of the Greeks with whom she was so familiar, — Homer, Pindar, Æschylus, Sophocles, Anacreon, Euripides, Plato, Theocritus, — passed into her own. In her essay on “The Greek Christian Poets,” — an example of wonderful prose writing, — she says : —

“What though the Italian poet be smooth as the Italian Canova — working like him out of stone, smooth and cold, disdaining to ruffle his dactyls with the beating of his pulses — what then? Would we change for him our sensitive Gregory, with all his defects in the glorious ‘scientia metrica’? We would not — perhaps we should not — even if those defects were not attributable, as Mr. Boyd, in the preface to his work on the Fathers most justly intimates, to the changes incident to a declining language.

“It is, too, as religious poets that we are called upon to estimate these neglected Greeks, — as religious poets, of whom the universal church and the world’s literature would gladly embrace more names than can be counted to either. For it is strange that, although Wilhelm Meister’s uplooking and downlooking aspects, the reverence to things above and things below, the religious

all-clasping spirit, be, and must be, in degree and measure, the grand necessity of every true poet's soul, — of religious poets, strictly so called, the earth is very bare."

Chaucer she deeply appreciated, and wrote that in him we "touch the true height, and look abroad into the kingdoms and glories of our poetic literature. He was made for an early poet," she continues, "and the metaphors of dawn and spring doubly become him. A morning star, a lark's exaltation, cannot usher in a glory better. . . . Nothing is too high for him to touch with a thought, nothing too low for him to dower with an affection."

How much of her own ethics of life is condensed in these words, — still of Chaucer:

" . . . And because his imagination is neither too 'high fantastical' to refuse proudly the gravitation of the earth, nor too 'light of love' to lose it carelessly, he can create as well as dream, and work with clay as well as cloud; and when his men and women stand close by the actual ones, your stop-watch shall reckon no difference in the beating of their hearts. He knew the secret of nature and


art, — that truth is beauty, — and saying, ‘I will make A Wife of Bath as well as Emilie, and you shall remember her as long,’ we do remember her as long. And he sent us a train of pilgrims, each with a distinct individuality apart from the pilgrimage, all the way from Southwark and the Tabard Inn, to Canterbury and Becket’s shrine; and their laughter comes never to an end, and their talk goes on with the stars, and all the railroads which may intersect the spoilt earth forever cannot hush the ‘tramp, tramp’ of their horses’ feet.”

It has been said that no one is a poet who is anything else. In the broad sense of the poetic temperament which pervades every thought and action this is true; but it cannot be accepted when restricted to poetic expression. Mrs. Browning was the greater poet in that she was much beside, — a critic, a philosophical observer of the phenomena of life, and a friend who, in her social relations, illustrated the ideal of the term.

How finely critical is her estimate of Wordsworth when she says: —

“Wordsworth’s eye is his soul. He does not see that which he does not intellectually discern,

and he beholds his own cloud-capped Helvellyn under the same conditions with which he would contemplate a grand spiritual abstraction. In his view of the exterior world, — as in a human Spinozism, — mountains and men's hearts share in a sublime unity of humanity; yet his Spinozism does in no wise affront God, for he is eminently a religious poet, if not, indeed, altogether as generous and capacious in his Christianity as in his poetry; and being a true Christian poet, he is scarcely least so when he is not writing directly upon the subject of religion; just as we learn sometimes without looking up, and by the mere color of the grass, that the sky is cloudless. But what is most remarkable in this great writer is his poetical consistency. There is a wonderful unity in these multiform poems of one man; they are 'bound each to each in natural piety,' even as his days are: and why? because they *are* his days — all his days, work days and Sabbath days — his life, in fact, and not the unconnected works of his life, as vulgar men do opine of poetry, and do rightly opine of vulgar poems, but the sign, seal, and representation of his life — nay, the actual, audible breathing of his inward spirit's life. When Milton said that a poet's life should be a poem, he spoke a high moral truth; if he had added a reversion of the saying, that a poet's



poetry should be his life, — he would have spoken a critical truth, not low."

Shakespeare she held to be, unquestionably, "the greatest artist in the world." She found him universal because individual, and she revelled in "the abundance of his winged thoughts."

Of poetic accomplishment she wrote : —

"The philosophy is, perhaps, that the poetic temperament, half-way between the light of the ideal and the darkness of the real, and rendered by each more sensitive to the other, and unable, without a struggle, to pass out clear and calm into either, bears the impress of the necessary conflict in dust and blood. The philosophy may be, that only the stronger spirits do accomplish this victory, having lordship over their own genius; whether they accomplish it by looking bravely to the good ends of evil things, which is the practical ideal, and possible to all men in a measure — or by abstracting the inward sense from sensual things and their influences, which is subjectivity perfected — or by glorifying sensual things with the inward sense, which is objectivity transfigured — or by attaining to the

highest vision of the idealist, which is subjectivity turned outward into an actual objectivity."

No study of Mrs. Browning's work is complete that does not include familiarity with her prose. As these extracts indicate, it is full of high suggestion and artistic charm. For she was a woman of great intellectual penetration. Her poetic gift, supreme as it is, does not suffice to interpret the wholeness of her power. Well, indeed, does she say: —

"With stammering lips and insufficient sound
I strive and struggle to deliver right
The music of my nature. . . .
This song of soul I struggle to outbear
Through portals of the sense, sublime and whole,
And utter all myself into the air.
But if I did it, — as the thunder-roll
Breaks its own cloud, — my flesh would perish there
Before that dread apocalypse of soul."

In these lines there is the overwhelming consciousness of her real self, — the immortal being temporarily inhabiting the physical tenement, with power too mighty to be

breathed through so frail an instrument. It is as if such an artist as Paderewsky sat helplessly before the reeds by the river, as the only musical mechanism granted him through which to pour out the passionate strains that haunted his soul. In all attitudes, mental as well as moral, Elizabeth Browning was great. Singularly devoid of self-consciousness, she looked out clearly upon all the movements of the time. Mrs. Jameson, as a devotee of æsthetics and art exclusively, looked askance at Mrs. Stowe's epoch-making novel when "Uncle Tom's Cabin" first thrilled the world, and to her Mrs. Browning wrote : —

"Not read Mrs. Stowe's book! But you must. Her novel is a sign of the times, and has otherwise an intrinsically considerable power. For myself, I rejoice in its success, both as a woman and a human being. Oh, and is it possible that you think a woman has no business with questions like the questions of slavery? Then had she better subside into slavery herself and take no rank among thinkers and reformers. Certainly you are not in earnest? A difficult question — yes. All virtue is difficult. England found it

difficult; France found it difficult. But we do not make ourselves an armchair of our sins."

At the time that the play commonly known in America as "Camille" appeared, there was a great hue and cry against it, and Mrs. Browning's independence of judgment is seen in the expression she made in a letter to Miss Mitford:—

"What do you think I did the other night? Went to the Vaudeville to see the 'Dame aux Camélias' on above the fiftieth night of the representation. I disagree with the common outcry about its immorality. According to my view, it is moral and human."

Still we return to the dramatic poem of "Aurora Leigh" as the supreme work of her life. To judge this work (as has often been done) as an economic or social treatise, is to recognize but one element in its kaleidoscopic splendor. It is rather a spiritual autobiography, an intimate and vivid revelation of a woman's nature of the most imaginative and highly organized type. In it, she herself said,

are recorded her highest convictions on life and art. It is a work so rich in imaginative suggestion and philosophic insight, so marvellous in its modernity, that we may well linger in its pages. So far as it discusses the problem of love and marriage, it might have been written yesterday. The present decade is one in which the question of marriage *vs.* art seriously confronts numbers of women, and in this poem, written half a century ago, lies the solution to the problem.

“Art’s much, but love is more. Art symbolizes
heaven,
But love is more and makes heaven.”

Mrs. Humphry Ward’s conclusion of the question for Marcella and her lover but reaches the same result that Mrs. Browning reached in *Aurora Leigh* when she wrote those thrilling, exalted lines at the close :

“ Beloved, let us love so well
Our work shall still be better for our love,
And still our love be better for our work,
And both commended for the sake of each
By all true lovers and true workers born.”

What chord of life or art is not touched in this poem? Love, art, philosophy, social economics, ethics, the Christianity of Christ, — all are here. It is an inexhaustible mine of intellectual wealth. What a picture she draws of a lonely, imaginative childhood, — of a girl who “had relations in the unseen,” and thus was guarded! How wonderfully is depicted those intense, despairing moments that haunt the early youth of impassioned natures!”

"O Life,
 How oft we throw off and think — enough,
 Enough of life in so much ! Here's a
 Cause for rupture ; herein we must break with life.

Then Life calls to us
In some transformed, apocryphal, new voice,
.
. . . we make our peace with Life."

The poets to her were "the only truth-tellers now left to God." What an arresting phrase is that in which she speaks of the word that,—

" . . . Burns you through
With a special revelation.

“ O life, O poetry,
Which means life in life ! ”

is the supreme recognition she gives to poetic art ; and what a flow of keen satire in the allusion to the young who

“ . . . Often sow their wild oats in tame verse.”

What moral sublimity in these lines :

“ I can live
At least my soul's life, without alms from men,
And if it be in heaven instead of earth,
Let heaven look to it — I am not afraid.”

And the thrilling pathos in these words :

“ Oh, alone, alone !
Not troubling any in heaven or any on earth,
I stood there in the garden and looked up
The deep blue sky that brings the roses out
On such June mornings.”

The profoundest occultism is in this passage : —

“ Whate'er our state, we must have made it first,
And though the thing displease us — aye, perhaps,
Displease us warrantably, never doubt
That other states, though possible once and then

Rejected by the instinct of our lives,
 If then adopted had displeased us more.

 What we choose may not be good;
 But that we choose it proves it good for us."

No Oriental savant expounding his doctrine of karma could make it more clear than does Mrs. Browning in these words.

Again, what philosophy of life in these lines : —

" . . . Natural things
 And spiritual, — who separates these two
 In art, in morals, or the social drift,
 Tears up the bond of nature and brings death,
 Paints futile pictures, writes unreal verse,
 Leads vulgar days, deals ignorantly with men,
 Is wrong, in short, at all points.

Without the spiritual, observe,
 The natural's impossible; no pain, no motion!"

The poetry of Mrs. Browning is not only that of the poet's inspiration, but it has the inflorescence of her exquisite and extended culture. Her genius was of that highest order which is the spiritualization of intellect. She is the first woman who has expressed the

pathos of struggling and repressed life in poetry as Millet has expressed it in painting. She felt, as did Hood, that the lover's song, and even the intimations of nature, are less appealing than the grinding toil that submerges the un comforted poor. To her was given the task to awake England, and the modern world, indeed, to a sense of the child-suffering in factory life. Her poem, "The Cry of the Children," appeared almost simultaneously with Lord Shaftesbury's great speech in Parliament on child labor. The poem and the eloquence together aroused England, nor has the echo lessened with the years.

There seems left little space to speak of her lyrics. Of them all, how the exquisite pathos of that line in "Catarina to Camoëns" comes back to us : " —

" Death is near me, and not you ! "

And the spirit of this stanza is her own :

" I will look out to his future ;

I will bless it till it shine,

Should he ever be a suitor

Unto sweeter eyes than mine."

Of the "Sonnets from the Portuguese" what words can fitly interpret their tenderness, their impassioned beauty!

A poem called "Confessions" is full of a mysterious power that haunts the reader in a series of pictures:—

"Face to face in my chamber, my silent chamber, I
 saw her,
 God and she and I only . . . there I sate down to
 draw her
 Soul through the clefts of confession . . . Speak!
 I am holding thee fast,
 As the angels of resurrection shall do at the last.

.

"When God on that sin had pity,—and did not
 trample thee straight
 With His wild winds beating and drenching thy
 light found inadequate,
 When He only sent thee the north-winds, a little
 searching and chill,
 To quicken thy flame . . . did'st thou kindle and
 flash to the heights of His will?"

And what touching significance is in these lines:—

"The least touch of their hands in the morning, I
keep it by day and by night.

Their least step on the stair, at the door, still
throbs through me, if ever so light."

In the poem "Loved Once" as well as the
"Sonnets from the Portuguese" is there re-
flected Mrs. Browning's consecrated ideal of
love.

" . . . The eternities avenge
Affections light of range.
There comes no change to justify that change,
Whatever comes — Loved once ! "

The pathos in "Cowper's Grave" will live as
long as the language in which it is written.

"O poets, from a maniac's tongue was poured the
deathless singing !

O Christians, at your cross of hope a hopeless
band was clinging !

O men, this man in brotherhood your weary paths
beguiling,

Groaned inly while he taught you peace, and died
while ye were smiling !

"And now, what time ye all may read through dim-
ming tears his story, —

How discord on the music fell and darkness on the
glory,

And how when, one by one, sweet sounds and wan-
 dering lights departed, —
 He wore no less a loving face because so broken-
 hearted.

“He shall be strong to sanctify the poet’s high
 vocation,
 And bow the meekest Christian down in meeker
 adoration.
 Nor ever shall he be, in praise, by wise or good
 forsaken,
 Named softly as the household name of one whom
 God hath taken.”

It has been said of Mrs. Browning that the
 question she asked in her lines of Mrs.
 Hemans —

“Would she have lost the poet’s fire for anguish of
 its burning ?” —

was one whose answer she, too, had to an-
 swer. The more intimate revelations we have
 had of her through the two volumes of the
 Macmillan Letters do not warrant this verdict.
 These revelations show us a woman whose
 happiness was as rare and as exquisite as
 was the quality of her life. In her work, too,

she has much to say of the "artist's ecstasy."
Take these lines from "Aurora Leigh:"

"If a man could feel,
Not one day in the artist's ecstasy,
But every day, feast, fast, or working day,
The spiritual significance burn through
The hieroglyphic of material shows,
Henceforward he would paint the globe with wings."

Had she not, indeed, all that makes the
rapture and the sacredness of life, — Art and
Love?

"'First, God's love,'
'And next,' he smiled, 'the love of wedded souls.'"

She was so essentially the artist she could
have found happiness in art alone. She was
so essentially the woman that she could have
found happiness in love alone. And God
crowned her life with both!

The sorrow of her brother's tragic death
out of which sprang her "De Profundis" came
at last to have its consolations. Even in its
saddest moments, she looked upward and on.

"For us, whatever's undergone,
Thou knowest, wilt, what is done.

Grief may be joy misunderstood ;
Only the good discern the good :
I trust Thee while my days go on."

The poems of "Bertha in the Lane," "A Musical Instrument," and "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" are household favorites; and in "Aurora Leigh" is there a dramatic poem which, in its special scope and place, stands alone and unrivalled in the English tongue. This is not to say that it outranks Shakespeare: but, instead, that it is too individual and unique to be compared with other dramatic verse. It is essentially a novel in poetic form; but it is enriched with profound and wonderful passages which are a permanent contribution to the literature of thought.

There is one aspect of Mrs. Browning's life which is very strongly revealed in the Macmillan edition of her "Letters," — that of her vivid perception of that class of spiritual realities which are known as psychic phenomena. This line of speculative and experimental philosophy interested Mrs. Browning as the indications of a potent and heretofore

undiscovered law. Faraday wrote to the Athenæum (July 2, 1853) a letter in which, commenting on the new phenomena of rappings and table-tipping which were then startling the world, he attempted to show that the motion of the table was due to unconscious muscular action on the part of the medium. Referring to this, Mrs. Browning wrote: —

“You will have seen Faraday’s letter. I wish to reverence men of science, but they often will not let me. If *I* know certain facts on this subject, Faraday *ought* to have known them before he expressed an opinion on it. His statement does not meet the facts of the case, — it is a statement which applies simply to various amateur operations without touching on the essential phenomena, such as the moving of tables, untouched by a finger.”

Again, in a letter to Isa Blagden she says: —


“If I am right, you will none of you be able to disbelieve much longer: a new law, or a new development of law, is making way everywhere. We have heard much, — more than I can tell you

in a letter. Imposture is absolutely out of the question, to speak generally; and unless you explain the phenomena by 'a personality unconsciously projected' (which requires explanation of itself), you must admit the spirit theory. As to the simpler forms of the manifestation (it is all one manifestation), the 'turning-tables,' I was convinced long before Faraday's letter that *many* of the amateur performances were from involuntary muscular action — but what then? These are only imitations of actual phenomena. Faraday's letter does not meet the common fact of tables being moved and lifted without the touch of a finger. It is a most arrogant letter and singularly inconclusive. Tell me any facts you may hear."

To how great an extent these manifestations of unknown laws occupied her mind is revealed in a letter written to Miss Mitford in August of 1853, which is given in full in the Macmillan volumes. Mrs. Browning writes: —

" . . . By the way, I heard read the other day a very interesting letter from Paris, from Mr. Appleton, Longfellow's brother-in-law, who is said to be a man of considerable ability, and who is giv-

ing himself wholly just now to the investigation of this spirit-subject, termed by him the 'sublimest conundrum ever given to the world for guessing.' He appears still in doubt whether the intelligence is external, or whether the phenomena are not produced by an *unconscious projection in the medium of a second personality accompanied with clairvoyance and attended by physical manifestations*. This seems to me to double the difficulty; yet the idea is entertained as a doubtful sort of hypothesis by such men as Sir Edward Lytton and others. *Imposture* is absolutely out of the question, be certain, as an ultimate solution, and a greater proof of credulity can scarcely be given than a belief in imposture as things are at present. But I was going to tell you Mr. Appleton has a young American friend in Paris, who, 'besides being a very sweet girl,' says he, 'is a strong medium.' By Lamartine's desire he took her to the poet's house; 'all the phenomena were reproduced, and everybody present convinced,' Lamartine himself 'in ecstasies.' Among other spirits came Henry Clay, who said, 'J'aime Lamartine.' We shall have it in the next volume of biography. Louis Napoleon gets oracles from the 'raps,' and it is said that the Czar does the same, — your Emperor, certainly, — and the King of



Holland is allowing the subject to absorb him. 'Dying out! dying out!' Our accounts from New York are very different, but unbelieving persons are apt to stop their ears and exclaim, 'We hear nothing now.' On one occasion the Hebrew Professor at New York was addressed in Hebrew, to his astonishment."

Scattered through various other letters from Mrs. Browning are paragraphs like these:—

"... Why do we make no quicker advances, do you say? Why are our communications chiefly trivial? Why, but because we ourselves are trivial, and don't bring serious souls and concentrated attentions and holy aspirations to the spirits who are waiting for these things? Spirit comes to spirit by affinity, says Swedenborg; but our cousinship is not with the high and noble.

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"If you have seen Sir David Brewster lately I should like to know whether he has had more experience concerning the tables, and has modified his conclusions in any respect. I myself am convinced as I can be of any fact, that there is an *external intelligence*; the little I have seen is conclusive to me. And this makes me more

anxious that the subject should be examined with common fairness by learned persons. Only the learned won't learn—that's the worst of them. Their hands are too full to gather simples. It seems to me a new development of law in the human constitution, which has worked before in exceptional cases, but now works in general.

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“ . . . Every *fact* is a word of God, and I call it irreligious to say, ‘I will deny this because it displeases me.’ ‘I will look away from that because it will do me harm.’ Why be afraid of the *truth*? God is in the truth, and He is called also Love. The evil results of certain experiences of this class result mainly from the superstitious and distorted views held by most people concerning the spiritual world. We have to learn—we in the body—that Death does not teach all things. Death is simply an accident. Foolish Jack Smith who died on Monday is on Tuesday still foolish Jack Smith. If people who on Monday scorned his opinions prudently will on Tuesday receive his least words as oracles, they very naturally may go mad, or at least do something as foolish as their inspirer is. Also, it is no argument against any subject, that it drives people mad who suffer themselves


to be absorbed in it. That would be an argument against all religion, and all love, by your leave. Ask the Commissioners of Lunacy; knock at the door of mad-houses in general, and inquire what two causes act almost universally in filling them. Answer, — love and religion. The common objection of the degradation of knocking with the leg of the table, and the ridicule of the position for a spirit, &c., &c., I don't enter into at all. Twice I have been present at table-experiments, and each time I was deeply impressed — impressed, there's the word for it! The panting and shivering of that dead dumb wood, the human emotion conveyed through it — by what? — had to me a greater significance than the St. Peter's of this Rome. O poet! do you not know that poetry is not confined to the clipped alleys, no, nor to the blue tops of 'Parnassus hill'? Poetry is where we live and have our being — wherever God works and man understands. Hein! . . . if you are in a dungeon and a friend knocks through the outer wall, spelling out by knocks the words you comprehend, you don't think the worse of the friend standing in the sun who remembers you. He is not degraded by it, you rather think. Now apply this."

.

How swift was her discernment of the truth now dawning upon the more intelligent general acceptance is seen in the following :

" . . . As to the 'supernatural,' if you mean by that the miraculous, the suspension of natural law, I certainly believe in it no more than you do. What happens, happens according to a natural law, the development of which only becomes fuller and more observable. The movement, such as it is, is accelerated, and the whole structure of society in America is becoming affected more or less for good or evil, and very often for evil, through the extreme tenacity or slowness of those who ought to be leaders in every revolution of thought, but who, on this subject, are pleased to leave their places to the unqualified and the fanatical. Wise men will be sorry presently. When Faraday was asked to go and see Hume, to see a heavy table lifted without the touch of a finger, he answered that 'he had not time.' Time has its 'revenges.'

" . . . Don't fall out of heart with investigation. It takes patient investigation to establish the number of legs of a newly remarked fly. Nothing *riles* me so much as the dogmatism of the people who pronounce on there being nothing to



see, because in half a dozen experiments, perhaps, they have seen nothing conclusive.

‘Yet could not all creation pierce
Beyond the bottom of his eye.’

“Mediums cheat certainly. So do people who are not mediums.”

.
The breadth of mind and logical fairness of her thought is shown in this paragraph:—

“What comes from God has life in it, and certainly from all the growth of living things spiritual thought cannot be any exception,” and, she adds:—

“As far as I am concerned, I never heard or read a single communication which impressed me in the least: what does impress me is the probability of there being communications at all. I look at the movement. What *are* these intelligences, separated yet relating and communicating? What is their state? what their aspiration? Have we had part or shall we have part with them? Is this the corollary of man’s life on the earth? or are they unconscious echoes of his embodied soul? That any one should admit a fact

(such as a man being lifted into the air, for instance), and not be interested in it, is so foreign to the habits of my mind (which can't insulate a fact from an inference, and rest there) that I have not a word to say. . . .

"*No truth can be dangerous.* What if Jesus Christ be taken for a medium, do you say? Well, what then? As perfect man, He possessed, I conclude, the full complement of a man's faculties. But if He walked on the sea as a medium, if the virtue went out of Him as a mesmerizer, He also spoke the words which never man spoke, was born for us, and died for us, and rose from the dead as the Lord God our Saviour. But the whole theory of Spiritualism, all the phenomena, are strikingly *confirmatory* of revelation; nothing strikes me more than that. Hume's argument against miracles (a strong argument) disappears before it, and Strauss's conclusions from *a priori* assertion of impossibility fall in pieces at once."

The increasing number of thoughtful persons, including many of the more eminent among the scientific and philosophic scholars who are engaged in the research and discovery of psychic law, will realize how potent a force for the upholding of truth, and for

the advancement and aid of the world to-day, is Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

When it is realized that a large number among the most noted scientists and thinkers of the day represent the advance of research and study into the relations between the Seen and the Unseen, the force of Mrs. Browning's judgment regarding the intimations of laws heretofore undiscovered is realized. The Rev. E. Winchester Donald, D. D., rector of Trinity Church in Boston, said in a private letter to a friend under date of June, 1898:—

“With Spiritualism as it should be defined you are legitimately and wholesomely in sympathy. So am I, I hope.”

And Dr. Donald added:—

“Have you ever noticed that spurious Spiritualism has no influence upon members of the Roman Church; while upon the adherents of a disputatious and rationalistic Protestantism its power is increasingly great? And I wonder if the reason be not that Romanism provides her children with guardian angels and patron saints, thus making real to them the unseen world;

while our Protestants ply our people — at least until recently — with the thunders of theological and ecclesiastical debate. It is an interesting, perhaps significant fact, this. Let me own that I confidently look for a great religious revival. The tide away from religion has ceased to ebb. . . . In that revival its leaders will be the spiritual disciples of men like William James and Stanley Hall.

“For the reality of the human spirit, reached and fed by something other than syllogisms and material facts, is now placed upon a solid basis and will soon fan into popular apprehension and belief.”

“For the reality of the human spirit is now placed upon a solid basis.” In these words Dr. Donald affirms an elemental truth that is entering the foundation of the new super-structure of life.

The essential essence of all that is embraced under the term “Spiritualism” is telepathy: the communication between spirit and spirit, irrespective of the body; and on this, as the fundamental law, the great English scientist, Sir William Crookes, bases all research. In

his president's address before the British Association of Scientists, in 1898, Dr. Crookes, after dwelling upon scientific discoveries and triumphs, said : —

“These then, are some of the subjects, weighty and far-reaching, on which my own attention has been chiefly concentrated. Upon one other interest I have not yet touched, — to me the weightiest and the farthest reaching of all. No incident in my scientific career is more widely known than the part I took many years ago in certain psychic researches. Thirty years have passed since I published an account of experiments tending to show that outside a scientific knowledge there exists a force exercised by intelligence differing from the ordinary intelligence common to mortals.”

Again the great scientist said : —

“And were I now introducing for the first time these inquiries to the world of science, I would choose a starting-point from that of old. It would be well to begin with telepathy; with the fundamental law, as I believe it to be, that thoughts and images

may be transferred from one mind to another without the agency of the recognized organs of sense,—that knowledge may enter the human mind without being communicated by the recognized organs of sense.”

Telepathy has become a recognized law. No intelligent person thinks of denying it, any more than he would deny the fact, however wonderful, of the ocean cable. Now if the powers of the mind while restricted by the physical embodiment can still so transcend those limitations as to flash through them to another mind, also thus restricted,—then what may not the mind free of these limitations and restrictions be able to do? For the physical body is not a help to the powers of the spirit for spiritual achievements. These proceed, not because of the body, but in spite of it; and thus, when freed from this virtual clog and restriction, how far *more* direct and powerful may be their effects!


Some years ago Professor Lombroso noted that telepathy tended to show that thought is essentially a vibratory energy, and is possibly

capable of correlation with other modes of motion. Tesla has stated his belief that the time will come when the power of thought might produce the action of his new engine, whose force, he believes, can be operated from Sandy Hook against a fleet in Southampton Bay. Here we have the practical scientist's belief that this theory of the nature of thought can be experimentally demonstrated. If thought has such marvellous power as this, shall it not flash from mind to mind across that gulf we call death?

The truth of the more or less constant telepathic intercourse between those still in the physical body explains a certain amount of psychic phenomena, but it does not explain all. Telepathic communication is the intercourse between spirit and spirit. It may, and we have undeniable proof that it does, exist in three ways: one being between two spirits each in a physical body; another being between one who has withdrawn from the physical body, and one still in it; and another form being that between two who have both

withdrawn from the physical body ; and that any one of these conditions is just as natural, just as much according to law, on the plane on which it acts, as any other. These are the three conditions under which telepathic intercourse occurs.

There can be drawn no arbitrary line labelled supermundane or supernatural to limit the occurrences that take place on the physical plane. For when, by the Röntgen ray, objects are photographed through a solid substance, as coins in an oak chest ; when, by the telephone, persons speak with each other from Boston to Kansas City ; when, by the ocean cable, America communicates with Europe instantaneously ; when Tesla has discovered in the atmosphere a current by means of which any amount of energy can be transferred to any conceivable distance ; when almost daily some new revelation of higher laws than had heretofore been grasped is made to the world, — who shall set up an arbitrary, fixed, and unmovable limit of “super-mundane” law ?



The illuminating truth is in the oneness of life, — the natural growing into the spiritual by the process of evolution. How clearly Mrs. Browning perceived this fundamental truth when she said: "I believe in a perpetual sequence according to God's will," and "every step of the foot, every stroke of the pen, has some real connection with, and result in, the Hereafter." The present is made of the past; it is constantly creating the future.

"Our past still travels with us from afar,
And what we have been, makes us what we are."

What we *are* determines what we *shall be*. It is all one sequence, and, as Bishop Phillips Brooks so wisely said, "Death is not the *end* of life, but an event *in* life."

The life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning is a more potent influence for enlightenment and uplifting in the world to-day than it was even when her visible presence was on earth. It was expedient for us that Jesus should go away. It is expedient for us that our friends go on into the unseen, — into that world which is the realm of those causes which are

seen on this plane as effects, — that out of that intenser life and nobler atmosphere they may draw us upward into a diviner life, — a life that may be divine here just as surely as hereafter. Man is a spiritual being, and now and here is the spiritual life.

“What would life be worth if it had not eternal relations?” once wrote Mrs. Browning to Ruskin. “Nothing would be worth doing, certainly. I am what people call a ‘mystic,’ and what I myself call a ‘realist,’ because I consider that every step of the foot, or stroke of the pen here, has some real connection with, and result in, the Hereafter. I believe in a perpetual sequence according to God’s will, and in what has been called a correspondence between the natural and the spiritual.”

Here is the same idea — expressed by Mrs. Browning in 1859 — that Dr. Henry Drummond so marvellously developed somewhere in the early decade of 1880–90. To a friend who asserted the teachings of Swedenborg to be that communication between those in the

Seen and in the Unseen was dangerous and debasing, Mrs. Browning replied : —

" . . . I don't think that you apprehend Swedenborg's meaning very accurately. If he saw sin and danger in certain communications, why did he consider it a privilege on his own part to live in the world of spirits as he did? True, he spoke of 'danger,' but it was to those who, themselves weak and unclean, did not hold 'by the Lord.' He distinctly said that in the first unfallen churches there was incessant communion, and that the new church, as it grew, would approximate more and more to that earlier condition. There is a distinct prospect given in Swedenborg of an increasing aptitude in men in the physical body toward communication with those who have passed out from the body. I consider that he foresaw not only what we are seeing, but greater and more frequent phenomena of the same class. . . . The teachings of Spiritualism are much like the teachings in the world. There are excellent things taught and iniquitous things taught."

Mrs. Browning quite understood that there was no necessary connection between genuine and fraudulent manifestations.

If a conference were called to consider the

subject of finance, would those in attendance spend most of the time in relating anecdotes of the making and passing of counterfeit money?

Now the manufacture of counterfeit money, however cleverly accomplished, is not a factor in the consideration of a system of finance; quackery is not medicine; chicanery is not a part of jurisprudence; and fraud is not a component element in Spiritualism. The counterfeit coin exists; so does quackery, and so does fraud in alleged Spiritualism. But it is not fraud that it is profitable to discuss, but truth, instead. The fraud has nothing whatever to do with the truth, and it is the truth which concerns us. "In the broad sense," said the Rev. Dr. Charles G. Ames, "Spiritualism is the antithesis of Materialism, and in that light all who are not materialists are spiritualists." This division is a peculiarly felicitous one, for the one fact of communication between those in the Seen and in the Unseen, however potent it may be for comfort and happiness, is yet but one detail in a great

philosophy of existence. The essential truths are God and Immortality; if to these the privilege of communication be added, so much the better; but he who would make this detail of communication the fact on which to base his belief or disbelief in the spiritual universe would be far from grasping any true conception of the nature of life. It is to be deprecated that there should ever be any emphasis of division on "Christians" and "Spiritualists." If a Spiritualist is not a Christian, what is he, indeed; and a Christian is — if we accept the fine definition of Dr. Ames — a Spiritualist, even though he may not believe in the fact of present communication between the two worlds. However important that detail may be, — and its importance would seem to be great, — it is yet subordinate to the vital issues of duty, of obedience to spiritual laws, of love to God and man.

Yet, that this communication exists; that it is a privilege whose exercise is uplifting and ennobling; that it is a normal part of the evolution of man's spiritual powers, is a truth

which progress will ultimately reveal to all humanity. As Mrs. Browning notes, and as any one by refreshing his memory on Swedenborg will see, he does not teach that this communication is dangerous *except* to the low, the base, who naturally attract about them the same quality of the base and low. Death works no miracle. "Foolish Jack Smith that died on Monday is still on Tuesday foolish Jack Smith," says Mrs. Browning. It would be equally true for a man to say: "There are so many base and corrupt people in this world that social life is dangerous. I will hold no communication at all with my fellow-men." Whether our associations in the physical world or in the ethereal world are exalting or debasing depends solely on ourselves. If it were not dangerous for us to have associations with Garrison, with Lucy Stone, with Phillips Brooks, when they were here and dwelt among us, it is not dangerous now. That we see no more the physical body in which they were temporarily clothed while here, in no sense works any miracle of change.

But it is objected again that if this communication exists it can be held only with the lowest and crudest order of spirit. And why? Is it the more exalted and nobler people on earth who refuse to aid and counsel their fellow-beings? Did Garrison and Wendell Phillips and Dr. Howe and Lucy Stone and Whittier declare that the conditions of the oppressed and the suffering and the ignorant were of no consequence to them, because, indeed, they were spirits of high degree? Do we discover in our daily present, that Edward Everett Hale, Mary A. Livermore, Julia Ward Howe, Charles G. and Fanny B. Ames, and others who might be named, being all exceptionally enlightened and noble persons, cannot be approached by those of us who look to them for counsel and help and illumination? Since when has it been the attribute of the noblest order of spirit to be inaccessible to the appeal of those who, also, are endeavoring to press on in the upward way?

“I thought I knew Phillips Brooks,” ob-


served a young minister who had been greatly privileged with his companionship, "but I never knew anything about him, I never saw the real man, until I saw him one day among a crowd of working-men in Faneuil Hall. Then all the ardor of his nature in his love, his brotherhood, came out."

Surely, we must hold that love and sympathy for our fellow-men are a manifestation of our diviner nature. Are we to lose these because we go on to the higher life? We all look to Jesus as the universal helper of men, yet we all, too, hold that His spirit is of a diviner order than that yet attained by our friends who have gone out and on, — however pure and noble their lives and their aspirations.

Rev. Dr. Ames, who is often singularly felicitous in his expressions, spoke once in a never-to-be-forgotten sermon of men as "co-workers with God." If man — even while here in his physical body — may be a co-worker with God, may he not also be when he is released from physical limitations and is

living more purely and freely the life of the spirit? May it not well be that, in the life a little farther on, just as in the life here, God works through means and not through miracles? If He wishes to send food or clothing to a destitute family, He does not precipitate it through the roof; He puts it into the heart of some individual to provide these necessities. The gift is not the less from God because it may come through our neighbor. May it not well be in the next condition of life that we may still more largely co-operate with God in ministry, both to those still in the physical world, as well as to those on the same plane of consciousness?

The most desirable results of this trend of philosophy will be reached when the means of communication are understood as between spirit and spirit, irrespective of any resort to that class of persons called psychics. We live, we move, we have our being, in the world of spirits, now and here; and all the forces of the diviner world, all its companion-



ships, all its inspirations, are open to him who can receive them.

The marvellous impressiveness of association and tradition that clings to Westminster Abbey in its sacred, historic grandeur is fully sustained, and, indeed, revitalized, by the preaching of Canon Wilberforce. It is he who is to-day the greatest spiritual force in the Church of England. He is as great in mental hospitality as was Dean Stanley, and he is singularly open to the progress in knowledge of the future life. He does not inanely take refuge in a feeble assertion that we do not and cannot know its nature, but he says: "Never be a giver-up of God's riddles: work at them till you die." And of death he says: "Death is but the Divine Evolver, saying to the old garment of corruption and mortality: 'Be opened, chrysalis; let the winged life out, that you have held so long.' It is awakening from the dream of life."

Again we find Canon Wilberforce saying:

"It is a strengthening, calming consideration that we are in the midst of an invisible world of energetic and glorious life, a world of spiritual beings than whom we have been made for a little while lower. Blessed be God for the knowledge of a world like this. It is evidently that region or condition of space in which the departed find themselves immediately after death; probably it is nearer than we imagine, for Saint Paul speaks of our being surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. There, it seems to me, they are waiting for us."

We are now recognizing that religion is a progressive science as well as a divine revelation; that man has been endowed with faculties to search and to discover truth; that all the progress of the world is due to the fact that humanity has worked and studied and struggled to attain knowledge. Nothing is more marvellous than the results of research in Astronomy: to be able to determine the composition of the stars and planets; to weigh and measure them, and calculate their courses, — how incredible would this be to one utterly ignorant of the applied methods of astronomical science?

Surely if man can weigh and measure a star millions of miles in space, he can learn something of the nature and destiny of himself. The phrasing used to be "to learn of the nature and destiny of his soul," as if his soul were a possession that he was carrying about. Now we know that the spiritual man is the real man ; that his body is the temporary clothing with which he is invested while in the physical realm ; and that the event of death liberates him into the real and the positive and the significant state of being. Death is literally, as Canon Wilberforce is preaching, "an awakening from the dream of life." That is to say, the life of the spirit when freed from the body is as much more important, and more largely and clearly conscious than here, as life by day is more conscious than dreams by night. The discovery, the development, and the culture of the latent psychic faculties in man are now appearing as the next steps in religious progress. We are living, as Canon Wilberforce says, "in the midst of an invisible world of energetic and

glorious life," of which, through certain conditions, we may ourselves partake ; into which, under the observance of certain laws, we may enter. This region "is evidently," as the Canon of Westminster continues, "that region or condition of space in which the departed find themselves immediately after death. Probably," he adds, "it is nearer than we imagine, for Saint Paul speaks of our being surrounded by a cloud of witnesses."

This is the recognition of the larger truth which God is revealing to humanity, and which offers infinite richness of resource for the teachings of the clergy. It is what the people want to learn ; it is that which they dimly discern ; for which they are reaching out, and it is in this knowledge that is best found the higher and more practical truths of eternal life.


The new aspects of Spiritual Philosophy have not come to destroy but to fulfil. They come to explain, to illustrate, to illuminate the teachings which Jesus gave when here on earth. "I have many things to say, but ye

cannot bear them now," he exclaimed. In these nineteen hundred years man has come into a development of his spiritual nature which enables him to begin to receive the larger truth. That the sculptured beauty of Westminster Abbey is echoing to this higher revelation of spiritual truth is a joyful sign of the times.

Annie Besant, who expresses herself in clear and scientific terms, asserts that a crisis in the history of progress is at hand, and says : —

"When humanity takes its next step upward, — and already there are signs here and there that it is preparing for it, — having made the physical vehicle perfect, its next work then will be to perfect its second vehicle of consciousness, that in which it is to function freely on the astral plane. Mankind will develop this, and the majority will be able to function on the astral plane as easily as to-day on the physical plane.

"What difference will this step make? In religion the open vision of humanity will bring within its scope that plane of existence called the astral, where many of the greater intelligences manifest themselves in form, for the helping and



the teaching of men. We shall learn to see and know the beings whose existence has been proclaimed to us by every mighty faith; we shall know them as we know or think we know those in the physical body around us now and here. We shall know the beings who inhabit that world that to us now is the Unseen. No man can be a sceptic as to the Unseen world when he knows in his ordinary waking consciousness the existence of those beings surrounding us on every side, any more than he could be sceptical as to the existence of his father or his children."

Mrs. Browning's intuitive spiritual perception discerned this future of which we are now on the threshold, and it was this that gave to her life the serenity and equipoise which perpetuates its influence and renders her a living power in the life of to-day.

Mrs. Browning's married life covered but fifteen out of her fifty-five years. All through her maidenhood she might, indeed, well have said, "the best is yet to be;" and although the curiously unreasonable attitude of her father regarding her marriage never relaxed, yet with this exception those fifteen years

were to the wedded poets a dream of bliss which even death itself could not break. The genius of each was perfected by this union. His art gained in clearness ; hers in strength.

The poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning is singularly calculated to communicate to the reader an exaltation of purpose and of spiritual energy. Like Emerson, she must be judged by something larger than the mere literary standard. One turns from her pages to the problems of life and destiny to feel anew that sublime significance thrilling through her words : —

“ I can live,
At least, my soul's life without alms from men ;
And if it be in heaven instead of earth,
Let heaven look to it, — I am not afraid ! ”

Not only as literary art, but as the expression of consecrated genius, the poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning will stand immortal in their influence. For this is the secret of her life and power, — that she recognized the inter-blending of the two worlds of the Seen and the Unseen ; that she held her art as a

sacred gift intrusted to her for divine purposes; that she recognized the nobler self in each person whom she met and thus stimulated him to realize his truer ideal; that her mind was generously hospitable to all the intellectual movements of her time; and that, above all, it may truly be said of Elizabeth Barrett Browning that she lived in conscious relations with those in the Unseen and in perpetual communion with the Heavenly Vision!

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